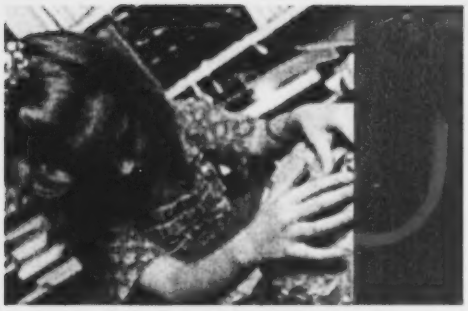
Education
Improvement
Commission

School Improvement Planning

A Handbook

for Principals, Teachers, and School Councils



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This handbook contains several pieces of information, including forms, that people who are developing a school improvement plan will find useful during the planning process. These items are listed below.

Each piece of information listed is available as a separate item on the CD-ROM version of the handbook—as both an HTML and a PDF file. In this print version of the handbook, these items are flagged with a CD-ROM icon.

The items in the list below that are marked with asterisks (*) are also available on the CD-ROM in word-processing formats (both Word and WordPerfect) so that schools may adapt them to their individual needs. Consult the CD-ROM for more information. (Please note that the CD-ROM may not work on older Macintosh computers.)

Each piece of information is also available as a separate, downloadable item from the Education Improvement Commission's website, *http://eic.edu.gov.on.ca*.

The items are as follows:

- Priority for Enhancing Curriculum Delivery (pages 20 to 23)
- Priority for Improving the School Environment (pages 24 to 31)
- Priority for Increasing Parental Involvement (pages 31 to 37)
- * Characteristics of Effective Schools (figure 2, pages 27 to 31)
- * Types of Parental Involvement (figure 3, pages 35 to 36)
- * How Do We Involve Parents? (figure 4, page 37)
- * School Improvement Planning Chart (template for figure 5, page 39)
- Sample School Improvement Plan (appendix B, pages 61 to 73)
- Understanding the Expectations and Achievement Levels in the Ministry of Education's Curriculum Documents (appendix D, pages 79 to 83)
- * Sample Parent Survey (appendix E, pages 85 to 90)
- * Sample Text for a Pamphlet That Principals Can Send to Parents With a Copy of Their School's Improvement Plan (appendix F, pages 91 to 94)
- *The Road Ahead – III: A Report on the Role of School Councils* (November 1998 report of the Education Improvement Commission)
- *The Road Ahead – IV: A Report on Improving Schools Through Greater Accountability* (April 2000 report of the Education Improvement Commission).

Letter from the Commissioners

November 2000

The Education Improvement Commission (EIC) is an arm's-length agency of the Ontario Ministry of Education. It was created in 1997 to oversee a smooth transition to a new system of education governance for the publicly funded elementary and secondary school systems in Ontario. It reports to and makes recommendations to the Minister of Education.

In January 1998, school boards in Ontario were reorganized. Seventy-two new district school boards were established. Many of the previously existing boards were amalgamated, some new boards were created, and some boards remained much as they had been before this date. One important outcome of the reorganization was the establishment of a new system of French-language boards that now spans the entire province.

Four distinct school board systems now exist in Ontario:

- English-language district school boards
- English-language Catholic district school boards
- French-language district school boards
- French-language Catholic district school boards.

These four distinct and equal systems share common goals and responsibilities, while the French-language and Catholic systems simultaneously protect and promote the cultural, linguistic, and religious values that are central to their individual purposes.

In 1999, as part of our mandate, we undertook a progress review of all 72 boards in the province.[1] In *The Road Ahead – IV: A Report on Improving Schools Through Greater Accountability*, published at the end of the review, we stated our view that "the development and implementation of a comprehensive accountability framework is the single most important factor that would have the greatest impact in improving our education system and student achievement."[2]

We concluded that we need:

- better information about our students' performance
- better information about the factors that affect this performance, and
- an increased focus on improvement planning at the provincial, board, and school levels.

In an earlier report, *The Road Ahead – III: A Report on the Role of School Councils*, we had recommended that all schools develop and publish annual school improvement plans, and that the planning process include a meaningful role for school councils and parents.[3]

To contribute to this goal, the Commission worked with 10 schools in the province to develop and pilot a school improvement planning process that includes parents.[4] Based on this experience, we offer this handbook as a practical, "how-to" guide to school improvement planning.

We express our sincere thanks to the principals, teachers, parents, students, and coordinators involved in the pilot projects. They have played a most important part in the development of this handbook.

Ontario is a large and diverse province. Whatever else a school improvement planning process needs to be, it clearly needs to reflect the unique issues and characteristics of each school community, including the unique needs of the Catholic and French-language systems. We know that boards, schools, and improvement planning teams will want to modify the material and processes outlined in the handbook to reflect their own characteristics and local circumstances.

We encourage these kinds of modifications, confident in the knowledge that improvement in student performance is much more likely if schools and their communities set out in an organized, focused, inclusive, and public way to *plan* to improve.

Our hope is that this handbook represents a significant contribution towards this goal.

Dave Cooke
Co-chair

Ann Vanstone
Co-chair

Peter Cameron
Commissioner

Rémi Lessard
Commissioner

Betty Moseley-Williams
Commissioner

Arlene Wright
Commissioner

1 Introduction

All schools want their students to succeed. But schools can only make a lasting difference when they focus on specific goals and strategies for change. School improvement planning is a process through which schools set goals for improvement, and make decisions about how and when these goals will be achieved. The ultimate objective of the process is to improve student achievement levels by enhancing the way curriculum is delivered, by creating a positive environment for learning, and by increasing the degree to which parents[5] are involved in their children's learning at school and in the home.

What is a school improvement plan?

A school improvement plan is a road map that sets out the changes a school needs to make to improve the level of student achievement, and shows how and when these changes will be made.

School improvement plans are selective: they help principals, teachers, and school councils answer the questions "What will we focus on now?" and "What will we leave until later?" They encourage staff and parents to monitor student achievement levels and other factors, such as the school environment, that are known to influence student success. With up-to-date and reliable information about how well students are performing, schools are better able to respond to the needs of students, teachers, and parents.

A school improvement plan is also a mechanism through which the public can hold schools accountable for student success and through which it can measure improvement. One of the first steps—a crucial one—in developing an improvement plan involves teachers, school councils, parents, and other community members working together to gather and analyse information about the school and its students, so that they can determine what needs to be improved in their school. As the plan is implemented, schools continue to gather this kind of data. By comparing the new data to the initial information on which the plan was based, they—and the public—can measure the success of their improvement strategies.

Real change takes time. It is important that all partners understand this as they enter into the school improvement planning process. Incremental improvements are significant, and they should be celebrated, but they do not constitute lasting change. School improvement

plans are therefore best designed as three-year plans:

- year 1 is taken up with the planning process
- year 2 is the first year of implementation
- year 3 is the year in which implementation continues.

During initial deliberations, or as time goes on, schools may wish to extend their plan for additional years to ensure that they maintain their focus and reach their goals. In any case, school improvement plans should be considered working documents that schools use to monitor their progress over time and to make revisions when necessary to ensure that the plans stay on course.

In developing their school's improvement plan, the principal, staff, school council, parents, and other community members work through a variety of activities focused on three areas of priority: curriculum delivery, school environment, and parental involvement. For each of these areas, schools establish the following:

- a goal statement
- performance targets
- areas of focus
- implementation strategies
- indicators of success
- time lines
- responsibility for implementing strategies
- checkpoints for status updates
- opportunities for revisions.

Appendix B contains a sample school improvement plan.

About this handbook

For school improvement planning to be successful, it must involve all school partners. When we refer to "schools" in this handbook ("schools should ..."), we mean the entire school community. The principal, as the person responsible for administering the school and for providing instructional leadership, is ultimately responsible for improvement planning. But the entire school community should be actively involved in all stages of the process: planning, implementing, monitoring, and evaluating progress. We have therefore written this handbook for principals, teachers, school councils, parents, and other community members who participate in the process.

The handbook is intended to be a practical guide for schools that are already involved in the improvement planning process, as well as those that are just beginning. Chapters 2 and 3 describe the areas that should be considered for improvement and the roles that various partners can play in making the process a success. Chapters 4 through 8 outline step-by-step activities that help schools develop their first school improvement plan, implement it, evaluate its success, and revise it to ensure continuous improvement. The appendices provide additional resources.

Each school and school community has unique needs and characteristics. Schools may find, as they work through the handbook, that they want to modify some of the premises, steps, and activities to ensure that their final plan reflects their specific needs.

Together we can effectively make the changes needed to improve student performance.

For example, the sections on effective schools and the role of the principal do not reflect the centrality of the Catholic church and faith in the work and goals of schools in the Catholic systems. Catholic school boards will want to work with their Church, their parishes, and members of their Catholic community to ensure that the materials and activities used to develop improvement plans reflect their purpose.

Similarly, French-language boards will want to work with members of the French cultural community to adapt sections of this handbook so that they adequately reflect the important role that schools in the French-language systems play in preserving and strengthening French language, culture, and institutions.

Diversity is evident in a multitude of other situations across the province. Schools in multilingual, multicultural settings face certain challenges unique to their settings, while schools in isolated parts of the province face a completely different set of challenges.

Secondary schools play different roles and face different challenges than elementary schools. In addition, secondary schools have not yet completely implemented the new curriculum. Because our pilot projects in school improvement planning were all with elementary schools, we may have overlooked conditions or factors that secondary schools will want to take into account in their improvement planning.

We anticipate that each school will adapt the processes in this handbook to its own needs. In several parts of the text, we have noted where such modifications would occur.

All district school boards should take the initiative and work with staff, school councils, parents, and community representatives to develop guidelines that will help schools modify their plans to reflect the unique cultural, linguistic, religious, and other demographic features of their school communities.

A CD-ROM version of this handbook is being distributed to each school in the province, along with the print version. For the convenience of those involved in school improvement planning, several pieces of information from the text of the handbook, including forms, have been reproduced on the CD-ROM as separate items. Some of the items are available in word-processing formats (both Word and WordPerfect) so that schools can alter them to suit their individual needs. These pieces of information are also available as separate, downloadable items from the Education Improvement Commission's website, *http://eic.edu.gov.on.ca*. A complete list of these items appears on page 2 of the handbook.

2 What Areas Should Be Considered for Improvement?

The overall objective of school improvement planning is an enhanced level of student achievement. To effect real change, however, the process needs to focus on specific priorities.

Student performance improves when teachers use curriculum-delivery strategies that specifically address the needs of their students, when the school environment is positive, and when parents are involved in their children's education. In planning improvements, therefore, schools should establish one priority in each of these three areas—curriculum delivery, school environment, and parental involvement. In effect, the planning process involves answering the important questions: "What will we focus on now?" and "What will we leave until later?"

Curriculum delivery

Curriculum is the foundation of the education system. The Ministry of Education has published curriculum policy documents that set out expectations for student learning in each grade and subject area. "The expectations... describe the knowledge and skills that students are expected to develop and to demonstrate in their class work, on tests, and in various other activities on which their achievement is assessed."[6]

The policy documents also contain achievement charts ("rubrics") that help teachers assess the level of each student's achievement in relation to the expectations. "The achievement levels are brief descriptions of four possible levels of student achievement. These descriptions, which are used along with more traditional indicators like letter grades and percentage marks, are among a number of tools that teachers use to assess students' learning."[7]

To set a goal for improving the way curriculum is delivered, principals, teachers, school councils, parents, and other community members participating in the improvement planning process must understand the expectations set out by the ministry and how well the students in their school are achieving those expectations.

Strategies to help schools set a curriculum delivery goal are described beginning on page 20.

School environment

Effective schools share a set of characteristics that add up to an environment that fosters student achievement.[8] By setting goals to improve a school's environment, principals, teachers, school councils, parents, and other

community members can make their schools more effective places in which to learn.

Highly effective schools share the following characteristics:

We are finally on the same team.

- a clear and focused vision
- a safe and orderly environment
- a climate of high expectations for student success
- a focus on high levels of student achievement that emphasizes activities related to learning
- a principal who provides instructional leadership
- frequent monitoring of student progress
- strong home-school relations.[9]

In assessing the effectiveness of their own school environment, schools and their improvement planning partners may wish to add to the seven characteristics described above. For example, schools in the Catholic systems will want to extend this list to reflect the Catholic vision of the learner, the pastoral priorities of the local parish, and diocesan priorities. Schools in the French-language systems will want to consider their role in enhancing students' understanding of French language, culture, and institutions, as well as the central role their school plays in the culture of their community.

Strategies to help schools evaluate and set a goal for improving their environments are described beginning on page 24.

Parental involvement

Research tells us that parental involvement is one of the most significant factors contributing to a child's success in school. When parents are involved in their children's education, the level of student achievement increases. Students attend school more regularly, complete more homework in a consistent manner, and demonstrate more positive attitudes towards school. They also are more likely to complete high school.[10]

Parental involvement helps a child succeed in school and later in life. To ensure parents are informed about and involved in their children's education, schools must foster partnerships with parents. Because parental involvement is one of the most significant factors in a child's success, it is crucial that all schools set a goal in their improvement plans for increasing it.

Strategies to help schools understand the needs of parents in their communities and set an improvement goal in this area are described beginning on page 31.

3 Who Are the Partners in School Improvement Planning?

Everyone involved in or interested in the operation of schools has a role to play in the improvement planning process. District school boards and superintendents of education play important roles in setting directions and in supporting and monitoring school improvement plans. The most important work, however, takes place within the school community itself. As we said in chapter 1, an effective school improvement plan results when principals, teachers, school councils, parents, and other community members work as a team to establish priorities, set goals for improvement, implement strategies to achieve those goals, and evaluate

e describe who should
chool improvement
outline the roles each
to carry out at each stage

District school boards

Distric ool boards help set direction and p e support for the school im ent planning process. They sh

ish vision and mission state- for the board and board vement plans, and communi- them to schools so that schools use them as a context for their rovement planning

- encourage school councils, parents, and other community members (for example, in the Catholic systems, the parish) to participate in the development of board and school improvement plans
- establish policies to ensure that school councils, parents, and other community members have meaningful roles to play in developing, communicating, monitoring, and evaluating school improvement plans
- support the development of team and leadership skills for school council members through training, conferences, and forums (and, in the Catholic systems, retreats)
- implement mechanisms to hold superintendents of education and principals accountable for progress towards the goals set out in school improvement plans.

It is also imperative that boards understand, through annual reports from superintendents, the goals being set by the schools in their jurisdictions. Boards can incorporate common school goals into their own strategic plans and allocate resources in ways that meet the common needs and priorities of their schools.

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In this chapter, we describe who should be involved in school improvement planning, and outline the roles each should or could carry out at each stage of the process.

District school boards

District school boards help set direction and provide support for the school improvement planning process. They should:

- establish vision and mission statements for the board and board improvement plans, and communicate them to schools so that schools can use them as a context for their own improvement planning
- encourage school councils, parents, and other community members (for example, in the Catholic systems, the parish) to participate in the development of board and school improvement plans
- establish policies to ensure that school councils, parents, and other community members have meaningful roles to play in developing, communicating, monitoring, and evaluating school improvement plans
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Superintendents

Superintendents must encourage schools in planning improvements, facilitate their strategies, and monitor each school's success. They should:

- develop a thorough understanding of the nature and characteristics of each school
- ensure professional development and training opportunities are available to school staff, school council members, parents, and other community members to help them develop effective improvement plans
- support school councils, parents, and other community members in becoming full partners in the improvement planning process by communicating with them regularly (for example, attending meetings of school council chairs)
- use principals' meetings to provide principals and vice-principals with professional development opportunities and to model strategies (for example, teamwork) that principals can use in the improvement planning process
- ensure that principals and staff receive the information (for example, the board's strategic plan) and the resources (for example, professional development opportunities) they need to carry out the improvement planning process
- ensure that schools use accurate and comprehensive information (for example, student achievement data, summaries of responses to parent surveys) in developing their plans
- provide support to principals when and where needed as schools implement their plans
- provide opportunities and venues such as the following for schools to work together to resolve problems and share best practices:
  - regional or family-of-schools meetings
  - newsletters
  - electronic discussion groups
- work with staff development personnel to ensure that their work increasingly focuses on helping schools achieve their improvement goals
- review school improvement plans with principals regularly, and request regular updates on implementation of the plans.

I believe that all partners in the education of children must have a clear understanding of their roles and must be committed to making a school improvement plan work. I am convinced after having been part of the planning process that this will happen.

Principals

Principals are *the* key players in the school improvement process. They play a wide variety of roles to ensure that the improvement plan and its implementation are successful. One of their most important responsibilities is to ensure that improvement plans reflect the characteristics of their own school and its community.

In Ontario's Catholic education systems, for example, principals, superintendents, and teachers should work in partnership as faith leaders to ensure that school improvement plans reflect Catholic beliefs and values. In the French-language systems, principals should ensure that improvement plans maintain the school's focus on celebrating and enhancing students' understanding of French language, culture, and institutions, and that the plans recognize the central role that the school plays in francophone communities.

In general, principals' roles in school improvement planning fall into three main categories, as follows:

Communication

Principals should:

- clearly explain the school improvement planning process to staff, school councils, parents, and other community members
- help staff, school councils, parents, and other community members understand their role in the process and invite them to participate
- provide the community with a school "profile" detailing the nature and characteristics of the school
- ensure that everyone involved in the process receives regular communications about the improvement plan and the school's progress
- communicate the final school plan to all members of the school's community.

Professional development

Principals should:

- encourage staff to lead the development and implementation of the plan
- provide leadership and professional development/training opportunities to staff, school council members, parents, and other community members involved in the process, and support them in developing and implementing the plan
- establish professional development goals with staff that focus on the goals and strategies in the school improvement plan
- ensure that professional development activities that focus on achieving the school's improvement goals are part of every staff meeting.

Leadership

Principals should:

- develop and circulate a parent survey to provide parents with an opportunity to describe their feelings about the school and the ways in which they would like to be involved in their children's education, and ensure that parents have adequate time to respond to the survey
- tally the results of the parent survey and provide it to those involved in the planning process to help them determine the goal for enhancing the level of parental involvement
- regularly collect classroom information on student achievement, use this information in discussions with teachers about adjusting and improving their teaching strategies, and ensure that this information is also used by those developing the school improvement plan
- lead school improvement planning meetings of staff, school councils, parents, and other community members
- regularly assess staff's implementation of the school improvement plan
- provide support and ongoing professional development for staff members as they pursue the strategies set out in the plan
- ensure that the school budget reflects and supports the plan's goals and implementation strategies
- continually gather information on student achievement and communicate it to the school's community as part of the plan's monitoring and evaluation process.

Last but not least, principals should lead their school and its community in celebrating successes achieved in the pursuit of the school's improvement goals.

Appendix C lists characteristics that effective principals share. Principals, teachers, school council members, parents, and other community members may want to reflect upon these characteristics as they consider improvement goals for their schools. School boards may find the list useful in developing professional development opportunities for principals. Of course, the characteristics in the list may be modified or augmented to suit the unique nature of each school.

Teachers

Since the ultimate objective of school improvement planning is to improve the level of student achievement, the person who has the greatest impact on students during the school day—the teacher—plays several critical roles in the school improvement planning process.

Teachers should:

- actively participate and assume leadership roles in establishing priorities, setting goals, and formulating implementation strategies for the plan
- work closely with school councils and parents to implement the plan
- ensure that classroom strategies for improvement address the needs of students at all levels of learning
- assess students in a variety of ways and develop strategies for improving the level of student achievement
- support the evaluation of the plan by providing up-to-date information on student learning, the school environment, and parental feedback
- set and pursue professional development goals that focus on the goals and strategies identified in the plan.

School councils, parents, and other community members

In June 2000, the Ministry of Education signalled its intention to ensure that parents' voices are heard in matters related to their children's education. Through a regulation to be developed under the *Education Act*, the ministry will require that district school boards and principals seek the advice of school councils in a number of areas—including the development of school improvement plans—and report back to the councils on how their advice has been taken into account.

We believe that school councils, a majority of whose members are parents, must be actively involved in the school improvement planning process to ensure that the priorities of the whole school community are reflected in the school's plan. Parents and community members who are not members of school councils may also wish to participate, and should be encouraged to do so.

In partnership with the school's principal and teaching staff, school councils should:

- participate in establishing priorities and setting goals and strategies for school improvement
- regularly encourage parents and other community members (for example, through school council

newsletters or at parent meetings) to participate in the improvement planning process

- review the school's progress in implementing the plan with the principal
- discuss the plan's goals and provide updates on the school's progress at council meetings and in the council's communications with the community
- work in consultation with the school's principal to build partnerships with social service agencies, recreation departments and facilities, community groups, businesses, and industries to help implement the plan.

In addition, school councils in the Catholic systems should:

- work in consultation with the school's principal to build partnerships with the parish
- provide leadership in and resources for faith education
- encourage parental, staff, and parish involvement in establishing good home-school-parish links.

School councils in the French-language systems should:

- inform the school's community about French-language cultural activities that are available to students and their families
- provide the school with resources to promote French-language cultural activities in the community.

Other school councils may wish to modify or augment the above list of roles with other activities that reflect the unique needs of their schools.

Students

Secondary school students and students in Grades 7 and 8 may also play a part in school improvement planning. They could:

- participate in setting goals and strategies
- help communicate the plan to the student body
- communicate the plan to their parents
- participate in strategies to reach the school's goals.

4 How Do We Begin?

I enjoyed working with a keen, dedicated group of parents and teachers who represent all levels of the school.

This chapter describes the first stages of the school improvement planning process: creating a school improvement planning team; assembling and assessing information about student achievement, the school environment, and parental participation (that is, the context for the plan); and establishing priorities for improvement through a series of activities.

Principals play a crucial role in these early stages. They facilitate the formation of a planning team, which will be responsible for establishing priorities, and they ensure that the information required for effective planning—such as aggregated report card marks, the results of assessments conducted by the province's Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO), and a summary of responses to the parent survey—is collected and made available to the team.

Forming a school improvement planning team

Principals should make every effort to inform teachers, school council members, parents, and other community members about the improvement process in a way that welcomes their participation.

In elementary schools, all teachers, members of the school council, parents, and other community members who wish to participate should be part of the planning process. Secondary schools, which usually have large teaching staffs, should ensure that at least one representative from each department is part of the planning team, as well as the school council, parents, and other community members who want to participate. In addition to offering their valuable perspectives and abilities, teachers will be able to help other members of the team understand data on student achievement as well as the potential value of and challenges involved in various improvement proposals.

It is vital that the team be representative of the school's community. Principals should work hard to persuade parents who represent a range of the school community's demographic profile to participate in the planning exercise. Other members of the community may be able to offer valuable insights and perspectives, and their participation should also be encouraged and actively sought out. Principals in the Catholic systems will want to include parish council members on the team, and principals in the French-language systems will want to include leaders from the local francophone community.

Parents' concerns and ideas were aired from the perspective of student improvement—we all were working towards one common goal.

Finally, secondary school students should also be represented on the planning team. Principals should encourage their involvement in the process, and perhaps seek out those who are student leaders, urging them to play a role. Principals in elementary schools may wish to involve interested Grade 7 and 8 students with the team's work.

All participants should have a positive attitude towards the process and understand that they must work as a team.

Scheduling meeting times for the planning team that are acceptable to both staff and parents may be a challenge. One solution is to organize parallel processes, whereby staff meet during after-school staff meetings and parents meet in the evening. The advantage of this arrangement is that it allows more parents to participate. To ensure that one group does not make decisions without hearing the views of and having a discussion with the other group, certain teachers could volunteer or be delegated to participate in both the after-school staff meetings and the evening parent meetings.

The school improvement planning team has the task of analysing data and information about the level of student achievement in the school, the effectiveness of the school environment, and the level of involvement of parents in their children's education. Based on their analysis, team members make decisions about areas that need to be improved (priorities).

As figure 1 indicates, the planning work should take place between September and January of year 1.

Figure 1. Setting Priorities: Time Lines, Activities, and Responsibilities

Time Lines (Year 1)	Activities	Responsibilities
September	Send out parent survey (see Appendix E)	Principal
	Assemble class profiles (or begin to collect student work as a basis for developing class profiles)[11]	All staff
October	Analyse parent survey	Principal
	Create school profile	Principal/staff
November – December	Analyse results of EQAO tests for inclusion in planning process	Principal/staff
	Collect student work for class profiles	All staff
	Analyse report card marks	Principal/staff
	Establish curriculum delivery priority	Entire planning team
January	**Establish school environment priority**	Entire planning team
	Establish parental involvement priority	Entire planning team

Understanding the context

Before the planning team begins developing a school improvement plan, all members of the team, including parents, must be aware of and understand certain key pieces of information that school boards communicate to staff and the public:

- the board's vision statement
- the board's response, as set out in its board-wide improvement plan, to the EQAO test results
- the board's strategic plan, which sets out its short- and long-term goals for the district.

In addition, everyone on the planning team should become familiar with the nature and characteristics of the school and its community. Many schools create a school "profile" that describes these characteristics in a way that is easy to understand. Reviewing the school profile and discussing each area helps everyone involved in the planning process understand the school, and it sets a context for the improvement plan.

A school profile could include information about the following:

- student demographics
- enrolment trends
- languages spoken in the home
- the school's mission statement
- the school's program priorities
- programs and services offered by the school (for example, guidance and library services)
- school facilities
- class sizes
- the rate of student turnover or transfer
- other relevant information.

Schools in the French-language systems would use the last category above to include information about the relationship between the school and local French-language cultural organizations. Schools in the Catholic systems would include information about the links between the school and its parish. Schools in all four systems will have "other relevant information" that will help the readers of the profile get an accurate and complete picture of their school.

After gaining an understanding of both the board's goals and the school's characteristics, the planning team is ready to begin setting priorities for a school improvement plan.

Setting priorities

As we stated in chapter 2, school improvement plans are organized around three key areas: curriculum delivery, school environment, and parental involvement. The improvement planning team must establish *one* priority in each of these three areas. The following activities will help planning teams establish these priorities.

Priority for Enhancing Curriculum Delivery

Step 1 – *Collecting information*

The principal must ensure that the planning team has the necessary information to identify which area of the curriculum (for example, mathematics, reading, or writing) is most in need of improvement. He or she must also ensure that the information collected is reliable—that is, that it was gathered on the basis of the expectations and achievement levels defined by the Ministry of Education. All teachers must understand, and have a *common* understanding of, the ministry's policy requirements.

The principal should therefore collect the following information for the planning team:

Results of the EQAO's annual assessments of students in Grades 3, 6, and 10: These assessments are based on the Ontario curriculum and achievement levels. The results are public information, and EQAO produces a report on each school. The school report contains a wealth of information that is not available elsewhere.

As a parent, the opportunity to sit across from teachers and dialogue about student achievement has been invaluable.

Report card marks: Report card marks must reflect a clear understanding of the ministry's expectations and achievement levels. Appendix D outlines activities that are designed to help teachers understand the expectations and generate reliable report cards. The report card marks made available to the planning team will not, of course, be individual students' marks, but *aggregated* marks, by grade and/or by subject.

Class profiles: Class profiles are collections of student work that have been compiled at specific checkpoints during the year. We suggest that November/December, March, and June are appropriate checkpoints for elementary schools, and the end of each term is an appropriate checkpoint for secondary schools. Class profiles give both teachers and principals up-to-date information about student achievement and provide them with a basis for developing teaching strategies for improvement. They also provide principals with a basis for assessing whether teachers have a clear understanding of the ministry's expectations and achievement levels.

In year 1, schools may not yet have developed class profiles based on reliable data. It is important, however, that they begin the process of collecting this data so that they can develop and maintain class profiles. Appendix D outlines activities designed to help principals and teachers create accurate class profiles.

Results of board-administered, national, and international tests: Some schools participate in tests, such as the Canadian Test of Basic Skills, that are given to all students by their board. Other schools participate in national tests, such as those administered by the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada, through its School Achievement Indicators Program. Schools may also participate in international tests, such as the Third International Mathematics and Science Study. If a school has participated in such tests, the results provide additional useful information for the improvement planning process.

Step 2 – *Discussing the information*

An open discussion, using all the information about student achievement that has been collected, allows all partners on the planning team to assess the school's strengths and weaknesses in the delivery of curriculum, and determine a priority for improvement in this area. The two activities described below will help participants with this important exercise.

Activity 1

A facilitator (the principal or a school board consultant) leads the planning team in a discussion by asking questions that focus on information about achievement. This discussion gives everyone an opportunity to understand the information and its value to the school improvement planning process, and to participate in the decision-making process.

The facilitator asks the following questions:

- Is there anything in the student achievement information that you do not understand?
- If so, what would you like clarified?
- Is there anything about the information that you find surprising?
- Is there anything that concerns you?
- How does the information fit with your feelings about how the students at this school are doing?
- Does it seem to differ from what you have experienced in the classroom or in the home?
- Did our students do as well as we expected them to do?

- What are some of the differences between the EQAO results and the report card marks of our students?
- What explanation can you offer for these differences?

Activity 2

The purpose of this activity is to establish the area of priority in curriculum delivery. Participants break into small groups seated at separate tables in the room, each equipped with a flip chart and markers.

The facilitator asks the groups to articulate the school's strengths and weaknesses in curriculum delivery, as follows:

On the basis of the data we have just examined:

- In which areas of the curriculum are our students performing well? (A possible answer could be "problem solving in mathematics.") List the answers under the heading "Strengths" on your flip chart.
- In which areas of the curriculum are our students performing poorly? (A possible answer could be "reading.") List the answers under a column entitled "Weaknesses" on another page of your flip chart.
- Why do you think our students are performing poorly in those areas?

The strengths and weaknesses must be derived from the measurable data on achievement that the group has examined.

While the weaknesses will ultimately furnish the priority for improvement, it is important at this stage to discuss the school's strengths as well. A discussion of weaknesses alone could make participants feel that the school is not doing anything well. By listing what *is* done well and posting the information, a positive tone is set for the discussion.

All groups post their strength charts together and their weakness charts together. All participants take 5 to 10 minutes to reflect on the charts and to ask each other for clarification. While everyone does not have to agree on each strength and weakness, everyone should understand each one.

Participants then spend a further 5 minutes grouping similar strengths and similar weaknesses. When this task has been

accomplished, two lists are developed—one showing all of the strengths listed by the groups and one showing all of the weaknesses.

Participants then reflect on the following two questions posed by the facilitator:

- Which of these weaknesses are most important to you?
- Of the most important, which one should be dealt with first?

The facilitator directs the groups as follows:

Think Consider the questions above by yourself. On a sheet of paper, record three weaknesses.

Pair Work with the person next to you and jot down your responses. Agree on and record three weaknesses.

Share Work with the whole group at your table to combine similar weaknesses and finally to choose three agreed-upon areas of weakness.

Each group posts its list of three weaknesses. All participants work to combine similar weaknesses, and a new, final list of weaknesses is posted.

Step 3 – *Deciding on a priority (dot-mocracy)*

The facilitator distributes red dot stickers to the team members. Each member receives a number of dots equal to *one third* the number of weaknesses.

All team members vote, using the stickers, for the areas of curriculum weakness that they believe should be addressed first. Members must use all their dots, but they may not use more than one dot per weakness.

The weakness with the most dots becomes the priority for enhancing curriculum delivery.

Example:

City Centre Secondary School's priority for enhancing curriculum delivery is to improve students' writing skills.

Priority for Improving the School Environment

Figure 2 (see pages 27 to 31) sets out the characteristics of effective schools. Research shows that students in schools that share these characteristics achieve at high levels.[12] Staff and parents can take actions to improve the school environment, even in the face of negative forces. Armed with awareness of these characteristics, they should examine the practices of their own school and identify areas for improvement.

Schools may wish to modify the worksheet in figure 2, which is adapted from an American source, to suit their individual situations. For example, schools in the Catholic systems will want to include home-school-parish relations and, where applicable, the school's role in promoting the Catholic faith. Schools in the French-language systems will want to include the school's role in preserving French language and culture in a minority setting.

Step 1 – *Collecting information*

The principal must collect material that will help the planning team determine a priority area for improving the school environment, such as information on the following:

- student suspensions
- student attendance figures, including both "lates" and absences
- behaviour/conduct, including the frequency and type of inappropriate behaviour
- homework completion rates
- level of participation in student activities
- kinds of student awards given out
- surveys of staff, students, parents, and other community members on the subject of the school environment.

Many schools will be able to think of other student-related data that would be useful to the improvement planning process. For example, schools in the French-language systems will want to design surveys to collect data about their students' involvement in activities and institutions in the local francophone community. Schools in the Catholic systems will want to design parent and student surveys about whether and how the school environment

could be complemented or enriched by stronger connections to the local parish.

The planning meeting that focuses on the school environment should allow for individual reflection, as well as small and large group discussions. The object is to allow the planning team to establish a priority that focuses on enhancing the learning environment, thereby improving the level of student achievement.

Step 2 – *Discussing the information*

Before the meeting begins, the facilitator should prepare in the following ways:

We all felt a sense of ownership throughout the process.

- Using the responses to the parent survey (see Appendix E), write the strengths of the school as perceived by parents on one piece of chart paper and the weaknesses on another.
- Reproduce figure 2 in the form of handouts for team members.
- Write each of the following characteristics of effective schools on a separate piece of chart paper:
  - clear and focused vision for learning
  - safe and orderly school environment
  - climate of high expectations for student success
  - high levels of student achievement through an emphasis on learning activities
  - instructional leadership of principal
  - frequent monitoring of student progress
  - strong home-school relations.

Activity 1

The team breaks into small groups. The facilitator distributes copies of the effective schools worksheet (figure 2), explains the worksheet, and asks participants to discuss it with one another as follows:

Think Spend a few minutes quietly reflecting on each of the characteristics of effective schools (reflect on the headings, not each item under the headings). Using the worksheet, respond to the questions: "What are we currently doing well in our school?" and "What are we weak in?"

Pair Turn to the person next to you and discuss how the school is doing in each area. Choose two areas of strength and two areas of weakness. (5 minutes)

Share Discuss your choices with the group at your table, agree on two areas of strength and two areas of weakness, and post these selections. The whole team then groups all the strength charts and all the weakness charts, and combines similar strengths and weaknesses. (10 minutes)

Activity 2

The team takes time to read the parent responses that are posted in the room. The facilitator then poses the following questions:

- Are the strengths and weaknesses collected from the parent survey consistent with the strengths and weaknesses you arrived at today?
- What are the similarities?
- What are the differences?

When these questions have been answered, the facilitator asks participants the following questions:

Based on all of the charts around the room:

- What are the three most important characteristics of effective schools that our school should work on to enhance student achievement?
- Which characteristic is most important to work on at this time?
- Will strengthening this characteristic enhance the learning environment and improve levels of student achievement at this school?

Step 3 – *Deciding on a priority (dot-mocracy)*

The facilitator distributes red dot stickers to team members. Each person receives a number of dots equal to *one third* the number of weaknesses.

All team members vote, using the stickers, for the areas of weakness that they believe should be addressed first. Members must use all their dots, but they may not use more than one dot per weakness.

The weakness with the most dots becomes the priority for improving the school environment.

Example:

L'École Jacques-Cartier's priority for improving the school environment is to create a safe and orderly school.

Figure 2. Characteristics of Effective Schools[13]

Effective schools have ...	How important is this to me? (1 = low; 5 = high)	What are we currently doing well in our school, and what are we weak in?
A CLEAR, FOCUSED VISION FOR LEARNING	1 3 5	
Parents, staff, and students help create a vision that is focused on student achievement. • The vision is championed by the principal, vice-principal, and school council. • An action plan has been created to put the vision into practice. The action plan is understood by all members of the community. • Staff, parents, and students work towards shared goals that will improve student learning. • All staff, parents, and students are able to answer the question "What does this school care about most?"		Think Pair Share

Effective schools have ...	How important is this to me? (1 = low; 5 = high)	What are we currently doing well in our school, and what are we weak in?
A SAFE AND ORDERLY ENVIRONMENT	1 — 3 — 5	
The school has an orderly, purposeful atmosphere, free from the threat of physical harm. • A behaviour code emphasizes respect, self-discipline, positive relationships, and the prevention of inappropriate behaviour. • Student discipline is fair and equitable. • Students of all ages take leadership roles. • Behaviour policies and expectations are understood by and communicated to parents, students, teachers, and all staff. • Students work together to maintain a safe school environment. • Programs are in place to address issues such as conflict mediation, bullying, and building healthy relationships.		Think Pair Share
A CLIMATE OF HIGH EXPECTATIONS FOR SUCCESS	1 — 3 — 5	
Staff believe, and demonstrate behaviour that indicates, that all students can learn and succeed. • Teachers' classroom practices and language reflect this belief. • Learning expectations are understood by all staff, students, and parents. • All teachers understand and use a variety of techniques to measure and promote student achievement. • Parents and staff believe that schools control the conditions for success (e.g., by insisting on high standards). • Academic success, citizenship, attendance, and other aspects of positive behaviour are recognized and celebrated school-wide.		Think Pair Share

Effective schools have ...	How important is this to me? (1 = low; 5 = high)	What are we currently doing well in our school, and what are we weak in?
A FOCUS ON HIGH LEVELS OF STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT	1 — 3 — 5	
The school emphasizes student learning, taking little time for activities unrelated to learning. Teachers strive to provide enriched learning experiences throughout the day. • Students spend most of the day working on curriculum tasks. • Classroom instructional time is protected, with announcements and other interruptions kept to a minimum. • Teachers work with one another as a team. • Teachers understand and follow the Ministry of Education's curriculum policy documents. • Classroom resources address cultural diversity. • Parents and teachers understand what homework is and why it is given. • All students are given opportunities to improve academically. • Students are able to express the purpose of their learning. • All students are given opportunities to succeed. • Co-curricular activities offer students opportunities to achieve success outside of the classroom.		Think Pair Share
INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP	1 — 3 — 5	
The principal is the curriculum leader in the school. • The principal demonstrates a commitment to accountability for student results. • The principal observes classroom activities on a regular basis.		Think

Effective schools have ...	How important is this to me? (1 = low; 5 = high)	What are we currently doing well in our school, and what are we weak in?
• The principal provides staff, school council members, parents, and other community members with the professional development/training they need to understand the curriculum and, in the case of teachers, implement it. • The principal ensures that teachers understand and implement a variety of assessment and evaluation measures. • Staff are expected to teach at a high level, and this expectation is communicated to staff, students, and parents.		Pair Share
FREQUENT MONITORING OF STUDENT PROGRESS	1 3 5	
Student academic progress is measured frequently. A variety of assessment methods are used, and the assessment information is used to improve student learning. • Teachers inform students and parents about expectations for students' work. • Teachers collect information about student progress on an ongoing basis. • Teachers communicate student progress to parents on an ongoing basis. • Parents are considered partners in their children's education. • Teachers understand the achievement levels as described in the Ministry of Education's curriculum policy documents, and apply these levels consistently. • Students and parents understand the achievement levels as well (i.e., the basis on which marks are assigned).		Think Pair Share

Effective schools have ...	How important is this to me? (1 = low; 5 = high)	What are we currently doing well in our school, and what are we weak in?
STRONG HOME-SCHOOL RELATIONS	1 3 5	
Parents are partners in the school. • Parents are involved in writing the school improvement plan. • The school involves parents in a variety of ways. • School council members discuss student achievement at their meetings. • The school informs parents about curriculum, assessment, and evaluation policies. • Parents feel welcome in the school. • Parents are involved in writing the school's homework and behaviour policies. • Teachers and parents discuss student learning and progress.		Think Pair Share

Priority for Increasing Parental Involvement

Parents care deeply about their children's education. They want to know what their children are being taught and how successful their children are. Parents also want to become partners in their children's education, but many have work commitments, job schedules, or family situations that limit the time and energy they can commit to involvement in the school.[14]

Principals, vice-principals, and teachers would like to involve parents more, but some are not sure how to do so. If parents and schools are to work together in a meaningful way as partners in the education of children, schools should provide parents with the information, opportunities, and support they need to become involved. Parents should feel welcome in the school and should be encouraged to ask questions and voice their concerns.

Parental involvement need not be restricted to participation in a formal organization, attendance at an annual parent-teacher conference, volunteering in a classroom, and helping out in the school library. Schools must look beyond these traditional practices

Whenever teachers, administrators, and parents get together in a constructive and non-confrontational manner, only positive things will come out of such a gathering.

and seek innovative ways to involve parents in their children's learning, both inside and outside the home. For example, schools can encourage parents to read to and with their children on a daily basis by offering reading incentives. They can also offer book-borrowing programs, and, when possible, trips to the public library to provide children who might not have books at home with an opportunity to obtain them.

Successful school-parent partnerships are supportive relationships in which staff and parents work together to improve student learning. Each school should strive to understand its students' family situations and work with that information and its own resources to encourage appropriate and workable types of parental involvement.

Step 1 – *Collecting information*

To help the planning team members arrive at a recommended priority area for improving parental involvement, the principal should provide them with copies of the following: the school profile, a summary of the information gathered in the parent survey (Appendix E), and the information in figure 3 ("Types of Parental Involvement," on pages 35 to 36).

Step 2 – *Discussing the information*

Before the meeting, the facilitator should make enough photocopies of figure 3 for team members to use in Activity 2, and then set up six pieces of chart paper for use in Activity 2, with the following headings from figure 3 (one on each piece of paper):

- parenting
- communicating
- volunteering
- helping students learn at home
- participating in decision making
- developing partnerships within the community.

The facilitator should also incorporate information gathered from the parent survey into the form provided by figure 4 ("How Do We Involve Parents?" on page 37) and make enough photocopies of this form for team members to use in Activity 3.

Activity 1

Using the school profile as a basis for discussion, team members answer the following question, listing their answers on a piece of chart paper:

- What are the characteristics of our community?

Activity 2

Schools may modify this activity to ensure that their individual needs are met.

The facilitator leads a discussion about the material in figure 3 ("Types of Parental Involvement"), pointing out the six types of parental involvement described and the examples of how schools can help encourage them.

To form six groups, team members "number off" (that is, one at a time, consecutively, they count off numbers from 1 to 6). Everyone who said the number 1 goes to chart 1, "Parenting"; everyone who said the number 2 goes to chart 2, "Communicating"; and so on. Once everyone on the team is in front of a chart, the facilitator asks them the following question:

- What activities are we currently doing at our school in the category on your chart?

Each group thinks about, discusses, and then records on the chart paper its responses to this question (4 minutes). Each group then moves to the next chart, reads what is written on it, and adds new ideas (4 minutes). The groups continue to move to the next chart until each group has had an opportunity to contribute ideas to all six charts.

When each group has contributed to each chart, the groups rotate once more, noting the information on each chart, and then all groups return to their places.

Activity 3

The facilitator distributes copies of the form from figure 4 ("How Do We Involve Parents?"), with responses from the parent survey incorporated into it. The groups spend a few minutes reading the responses. The facilitator then leads the whole

team in a discussion of the responses, asking the following questions:

- How do parents feel we are doing?
- Is there one (or more) type(s) of involvement that we are doing especially well?
- Is there one (or more) type(s) that we are not doing well?
- Which areas are of concern to parents?
- Based on parent feedback, which areas are of concern to us?

The facilitator then asks the following questions:

Based on the characteristics of our community, the information from our parent survey, and the ideas we have listed on our charts today:

- Which area matters most to us at this time?
- Which area should we begin with?

All the groups post their responses.

Step 3 – *Deciding on a priority (dot-mocracy)*

The facilitator distributes two red dot stickers to each team member. Each member votes by placing a dot beside the two types of parental involvement practices that he or she thinks should be most important to the school at this time.

The area with the most dots becomes the priority for increasing parental involvement.

Example:

St. Paul's Catholic School's priority for increasing parental involvement is to help parents support their children's learning at home.

Figure 3. Types of Parental Involvement

Type of involvement	School's role	Examples of how the school can help
Parenting	Help parents establish homes that support students.	Offer suggestions that will support learning. • Ask your child what happened at school each day. • Encourage your child to read nightly by providing him/her with books. • If possible, have a quiet area in the house where your child can do homework. • Try to have your child complete homework at a regular time each day.
		Offer parents opportunities to learn more about parenting. • Provide information about parenting courses in the community. • Hold workshops in the evening and have videos/articles for parents to borrow on parenting and child development.
		Offer family support programs. • Work with community partners so that parents can receive important information about children's health issues (e.g., nutrition).
		Get to know the parents in the school's community, and encourage them to get to know the school. • Make home visits or phone calls at the beginning of the school year to welcome parents into the school and help them understand it, and to enable school staff to become acquainted with individual parents and their uniqueness.
Communicating	Offer many opportunities for home-to-school and school-to-home communication about school programs and students' progress.	• Hold a conference with all parents at least once a year, and follow up as needed. • Provide translation as needed for all important communications. • Send home folders of student work weekly or monthly for parental review and comment. • Ensure that every parent has an interview with the child's teacher after the child's first report card each year. • Provide parents with clear information about choosing courses, programs, and other school activities. • Ensure that all parents receive at least one good-news phone call a term. • Ensure that parents of children at risk are aware of their child's situation and have an opportunity to provide input about the remedy.

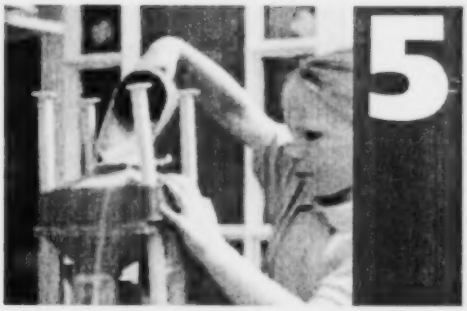
Closely adapted from Epstein, Joyce L., L. Coates, K.C. Salinas, M.G. Sanders, and B.S. Simon, *School, Family and Community Partnerships: Your Handbook for Action* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press, 1997). Copyright 1997 by Corwin Press. Adapted with permission of Corwin Press.

Type of involvement	School's role	Examples of how the school can help
Volunteering	Invite parents to volunteer in the school, and organize to make them feel welcome.	• Provide school and classroom volunteer opportunities, where parents can help teachers, students, administrators, and other parents. • Provide parents with training for the specific job the school would like them to do. • Ask a parent committee to coordinate the work of volunteers. • If possible, provide a "volunteer room" or other place where volunteers can gather. • Conduct an annual survey to collect information about the talents and interests of parents in the school community. • Arrange for one parent per class to act as a liaison for all parents. Establish a telephone "tree" for each class. • Show parent volunteers that you appreciate their help with a celebration.
Helping students learn at home	Provide ideas and information to parents about how to help students with homework and other curriculum-related activities, plans, and decisions.	• Provide information to parents on what students will learn in each subject area. • Hold curriculum evenings for parents. • Involve parents in creating the school's homework policy, and then inform all parents of the policy. • Provide students with clear instructions for their homework assignments, so that parents can help with homework. • Provide parents with a schedule of homework that alerts them to one or more assignments that will require students to work with their parents to complete the task. • Provide calendars of school/curriculum activities for parents. • Encourage parents to work with their children in setting goals. • Hold student-led conferences once a year to discuss each student's progress. • Ensure parents understand the provincial report card and the reporting process.
Participating in decision making about their children's education	Include parents in the school's decision-making process.	• Encourage school councils to focus on student achievement and student activities. • Ask parents to participate in the development of the school's homework policies. • Ask parents to participate in the development and implementation of behaviour policies.
Developing partnerships within the community	Identify resources in the community that can help the school improve the level of student achievement.	• Provide parents with information about community health, cultural, recreational, social support, and other programs and services. • Provide parents with information about community activities that could enhance student learning and students' skills and talents, including summer programs. • Develop partnerships with community service organizations such as counselling, health, cultural, recreational, social support, and other agencies

Closely adapted from Epstein, Joyce L., L. Coates, K.C. Salinas, M.G. Sanders, and B.S. Simon, *School, Family and Community Partnerships: Your Handbook for Action* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press, 1997). Copyright 1997 by Corwin Press. Adapted with permission of Corwin Press.

Figure 4. How Do We Involve Parents?

How Do We Involve Parents?					
In being an effective parent	In communicating effectively with the school	In volunteering	In helping students learn at home	In participating in decision making about their children's education	In making use of the resources and services available in the community to enhance their children's ability to learn



5 How Do We Create a Plan?

Once a school has set its three priority areas for improvement, action teams can be formed and they can start working with figure 5 ("School Improvement Planning Chart"). The chart in figure 5 is designed to help teams establish goals, performance targets, areas of focus, strategies for achieving the goals, indicators of success, time lines, responsibilities, and provisions for monitoring the plan and revising it if necessary. (Appendix B is a sample plan based on this chart.)

Figure 5. School Improvement Planning Chart

Goal:						
Performance Target:						
Focus	Strategies	Indicators of Success	Time Lines	Responsibility	Status Update	Revisions

As a member of an action team and a parent, this has been a marvellous opportunity for communication between parents and staff, to come together to share their thoughts and ideas.

Forming action teams

Principals encourage teachers, school council members, parents, and other community members to participate—this time in drafting the actual improvement plan.

One action team is formed for each of the three priority areas: curriculum delivery, school environment, and parental involvement.

Action teams usually have fewer members than the planning team, but those who were involved in determining the school's priorities should be invited to join an action team. Action team members may be made up of the entire original group of staff, school council members, parents, other community members, and students who sat on the planning team, or only a representative few. Those who are interested in participating should have the option of signing up for the action team to which they feel they have the most to contribute.

Each action team should have a leader (possibly someone from the school's leadership team) to facilitate the process of completing the school improvement planning chart.

Once the membership of the teams has been established, principals should assure other interested parties that they will be kept informed about the improvement process, and that other opportunities to participate in it will arise later.

Figure 6. Drafting the Plan: Time Lines, Activities, and Responsibilities

Time Lines (Year 1)	Activities	Responsibilities
February – March	Draft the plan: establish goals, performance targets, areas of focus, strategies, indicators of success, time lines, responsibilities, and opportunities for status updates and revisions in each of the three priority areas: • curriculum delivery • school environment • parental involvement.	Action teams
April	Revise the plan if necessary.	Action teams
	Present the draft plan to parents and students.	Staff/parent teams
	Finalize the plan.	Action teams
	Publish and publicize the plan.	Principal
May	Start implementing the plan.	Staff/school council/ parents/students

Setting goals

The first task of each action team is to create a goal statement.

To do so, action team members should review the planning team's priority statement and the background information used by the planning team in arriving at its decision (for example, data on student achievement or the results of the parent survey).

Goal statements are general statements that focus on improving the level of student achievement. They are:

- based on solid background information
- written in easy-to-read language
- measurable.

All members of the action team must agree on the goal statement.

Example:

The planning team selected "improving students' writing skills" as a priority area. The goal statement may read as follows:

To raise the overall level of students' writing skills as measured in standard assessments.

Setting performance targets

The action teams' next task is to set performance targets.

Performance targets are also measurable statements that indicate the level at which the school would like to be performing on a given goal by a given time. Performance targets focus on numbers and attempt to predict the future.

When action teams are setting performance targets, it is important for everyone to remember that change takes time. While the target should present a challenge, it should be a reasonable challenge. It is better to start slow. If the strategies implemented to achieve a goal work well and the target begins to appear too low, it can always be adjusted upward later in the three-year process. Such an adjustment is always better for morale than a downward adjustment or a failure to meet the target.

Examples:

By the end of year 3, 60% of the students who were achieving at level 2 in writing will be achieving at level 3.

By the end of year 3, the number of reported bullying incidents will be reduced by 50%.

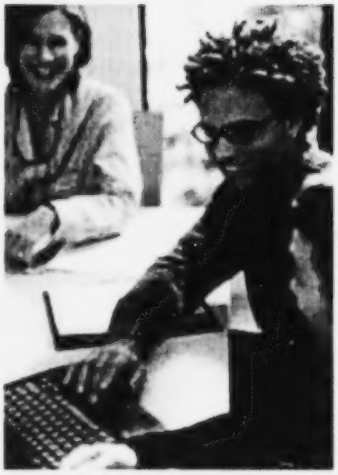
(It may be difficult to set a performance target for parental involvement, but performance targets should be set wherever change can be measured by numbers or percentages.)

Defining a focus

While the goal statements have narrowed down the statements of priority, action teams may wish to focus even more. Improvements are best accomplished in bite-size chunks.

If an action team has set a goal to improve student performance in math, for example, it could choose to focus on one or two of the five "strands," or major areas of knowledge and skills, in the mathematics curriculum.

To hear that both parents and teachers are excited to learn more about focused topics and improve their teaching as a result is uplifting!



To establish areas of focus, action team members will need to look at available background information once again and answer the following question:

- What do we need to focus on *specifically* to enhance curriculum delivery in this area (or improve our school environment, or improve parental involvement) so that the level of student achievement will improve in our school?

By choosing a specific focus, action teams will also be able to develop specific strategies to achieve their goals. The strategies will not seem overwhelming, and all participants will feel that they are working on something doable.

Example:

If the goal statement in the parental involvement priority area is: "to help parents support their children's learning at home," two examples of specific focus could be:

Develop a homework policy.

Improve parents' knowledge about the curriculum.

Developing strategies

Strategies are the specific actions that will be taken by principals, teachers, school councils, parents, other community members, and students to help the school work towards achieving its goals in each of the three priority areas.

To begin developing strategies, action teams should answer the following question:

- What specific actions are we going to take to improve in this area?

The actions or strategies identified by the teams must be different from those currently used at the school.

In proposing strategies, action teams must keep the ultimate objective of school improvement planning in mind: to enhance the level of student achievement in the school. To help identify strategies, the three action teams should answer the appropriate question from the following list:

- What specific teaching and other strategies can we implement to meet our goal in the curriculum area so that the level of student achievement in our school is enhanced?
- What specific strategies can we implement or what specific actions can we take to meet our goal in the school environment area so that the level of student achievement in our school is enhanced?
- What specific strategies can we implement or what specific actions can we take to meet our goal in the parental involvement area so that the level of student achievement in our school is enhanced?

Example:

A first-step strategy for improving the school environment, where the goal is to "reduce incidents of bullying," could be as follows:

Establish a committee of parents and teachers to investigate anti-bullying programs and decide upon one for the school.

Establishing indicators of success

Indicators of success provide schools with standards against which they can measure their progress towards their improvement goals. Meeting the performance target is the ultimate indicator of success, but action teams should also develop indicators that act as benchmarks or milestones along the way. In fact, each strategy could have a corresponding indicator of success, marking the completion of that step on the road to meeting the goal.

Action teams should answer the following questions to arrive at indicator statements:

- If we carry out all of our strategies, how will we know that we have attained our goal?
- What will be different for the students?
- What will students do differently that will tell us we have been successful?

Indicators of success are performance-based and measurable (or, in the case of increased parental involvement, observable).

Example:

If a school has developed a step-by-step strategy to develop and implement a code of behaviour, indicators of success could be as follows:

Committee formed.

Draft code submitted to school administration.

Code finalized.

Copy of code sent to all students and parents.

Code introduced at all-student assembly.

Incident log created and provided to all staff.

Incident log indicates 60% decrease in bullying incidents.

Establishing time lines

Action teams must look closely at each strategy they are suggesting to determine the most suitable time to begin work on that strategy, as well as the duration of the strategy. Team members should keep in mind that the plan is a three-year plan, and that change takes time.

When each action team has arrived at time lines for all of its strategies, the principal, staff, and school council should hold meetings to review the proposed time lines and determine if they are doable. All staff members must understand the proposals in the context of the whole plan. The plan may need to be adjusted—for example, if the principal, teachers, or school council members feel that the action teams propose introducing too many strategies in one year or term.

Examples:

Two different strategies for improving the delivery of curriculum could have time lines as follows:

Year 2, Terms 1, 2, 3

Year 1, Term 1 (ongoing)

The entire project fostered within us a strong sense of accountability.

Establishing responsibilities

Action teams also determine who will be responsible for implementing each strategy. In many cases, teachers will implement the strategies, but in some cases the principal or the school council will be responsible for implementation.

The action teams' proposals for responsibility will also have to be reviewed by the principal, staff, and school council, to ensure that the proposals are reasonable and that everyone understands his or her responsibilities within the plan.

Example:

A school that has devised strategies to develop a homework policy could have the following groups listed on its improvement planning chart as being responsible for specific successive strategies:

Teachers

School council

Parents

Status updates

Once schools have finished writing their improvement plans, there will be a tendency to "get on with the real job of teaching." But to sustain change, schools need to ensure that staff, parents, and students continue to focus on the plan's goals, that the strategies are being implemented, and that everyone involved is receiving the support he or she needs.

Improvement plans should be monitored on an ongoing basis in an informal way. Principals should drop by classrooms and discuss the progress of various strategies with teachers, and meet with school councils to talk about issues related to the plan. Teachers and parents should also discuss the progress of strategies on an informal basis from time to time. In addition to these routine monitoring processes, the principal, staff, parents, and students all need to have specific opportunities to review the status of the various strategies in the plan, offer their opinions on the progress made, and suggest revisions (if needed) to maintain the focus on improvement.

Action teams should therefore build into the plan a series of checkpoints for status updates—that is, formal evaluations of the plan in progress.

Status updates serve several functions. A school improvement plan is a process. As in any process, some strategies will have the desired impact and others will not. Some time lines will be adequate, but it will become evident over time that others are not. Status updates support the concept that the plan is a working document and can be adjusted as necessary. Status updates also provide perfect opportunities for superintendents to discuss progress on a school's improvement plan with the principal, teachers, and school council members.

By building in opportunities for review, the plan also encourages schools to take risks in setting goals and to experiment with new strategies. If these risks and experiments prove, after time, to be unsuccessful, the goals and strategies can be adjusted to ensure that the school maintains its focus on improvement.

The natural breaks in the school year—December, March, and June at the elementary level, and term end at the secondary level—are ideal times for a status update. For example, at these times principals and teachers could

review the class profiles (described in chapter 4 and Appendix D) and other assessment data. Those reviewing the school improvement plan would be able to use this information as one measure of whether the strategies identified in the plan have the desired results.

Example:

As noted above, the natural breaks in the school year would be appropriate points for status updates.

Revisions

The evaluation and revision process is described in detail in chapter 6. At this point, we will only note that a school's decision to revise a focus, strategy, or time line should be based on the same kinds of solid data as those used to determine the original goals, focuses, strategies, and time lines.

6 How Do We Implement the Plan?

We were able to work together and gain a greater appreciation of our different points of view, but at the same time recognize the common ground we share.

As the plan is being developed, the principal should think about how to begin implementing it. Existing procedures may need to be adjusted to shift the focus to and maintain it on improvement.

Changing procedures

Principals, staff, and school councils should consider making changes to the daily timetable to support the plan's goals and strategies. Changes to the timetable convey the message that the school is serious about change. Life at school is no longer "business as usual."

To support improvement goals in the area of curriculum delivery, elementary schools may want to devote large blocks of time to certain parts of the curriculum—for example, math/science/technology and language/literacy. Secondary schools may want to arrange for certain teachers to share the responsibility for more than one area of the curriculum—for example, math and science—to allow those teachers to integrate the content of the two subjects for students. Organizational and procedural changes can also be made to help achieve goals in the areas of school environment and parental involvement.

Change cannot occur without the resources to support it. By making sure that budget decisions support the school's improvement goals, principals will demonstrate their commitment to change and send the message to everyone in the school's community that the school improvement plan drives administrative decisions.

As partners in the school improvement planning process, school councils have an important role to play. In many schools, they raise funds through community drives. School councils that are full partners in the process are likely to decide to spend the funds they have raised in ways that support the plan's improvement goals.

Informing and supporting staff

A status update on the school improvement plan should be on the agenda of every staff meeting. Monthly updates will communicate the importance of the plan and provide a focus for the activities related to its implementation.

Staff should receive opportunities for professional development to help them make the adjustments necessary to implement the plan's strategies.

Professional development activities should be a part of every staff meeting. Many schools schedule one staff meeting and one curriculum, divisional, or departmental meeting a month. By setting aside some time at these meetings to focus on the improvement plan and goals, principals will ensure that the plan stays on course.

Informing and supporting school councils

As partners in the improvement process, school councils also need regular status updates on the school improvement plan. These updates should be on the agenda of every school council meeting, for the same reasons that they should be on staff meeting agendas—to communicate the plan's importance and to provide a continuing focus on its implementation.

School council members also need support to play their roles in implementing the plan. For example, they will be extensively involved in strategies to increase the level of parental involvement, and they may also play a substantial part in strategies to improve the school environment. They need to be kept informed, offered support, and (where necessary and possible) provided with training opportunities to help them carry out their responsibilities.

Because school councils are partners in the improvement process, and because they represent the school's community, principals should make special efforts to ensure that school council members understand the nature of the changes being proposed and are aware of any difficulties that may be encountered in the process.

Informing the community

Principals are responsible for advising parents and the entire school community about the plan, its goals, strategies, and time lines. All parents should receive a copy of the plan. Appendix F contains text for a pamphlet that principals may wish to send to parents with a copy of the plan.

In addition to providing regular status updates to staff and school councils, principals should use school newsletters, websites, open houses, and information nights to keep the broader community informed about the plan, the school's progress in meeting the plan's goals, and, when necessary, the challenges involved. District school boards could issue press releases and provide interviews to local media on the school's progress.

"Nothing succeeds like success," and celebrating successes along the way is an important part of the principal's leadership and communication roles. In addition to raising morale, celebrations acknowledge the work that has been done, and encourage all members of the school community to push ahead to meet the plan's goals.

Implementing the plan

Figure 7 sets out the time lines for implementing the plan, the activities involved, and those responsible for the various activities.

Figure 7. Implementing the Plan: Time Lines, Activities, and Responsibilities

Time Lines (Year 1–2)	Activities	Responsibilities
June	Begin collecting information for the class profiles described in Appendix D.	All staff
September – December	Review the plan with staff and parents.	All staff, parents, and students (where appropriate)
	Begin working on strategies.	
December	Collect data: • report card marks—for the school year to date • EQAO results—elementary level • class profiles.	All staff
	Examine data. Begin to establish trends in student achievement.	Staff, parents, and students (where appropriate); evaluation teams
	Celebrate successes.	Everyone involved
February – April	Collect data: • report card marks—for the school year to date • class profiles • EQAO results—Grade 10 reading and writing.	All staff
	Status update: Re-examine data and implementation strategies.	Staff, parents, and students (where appropriate); evaluation teams
	Celebrate successes.	Everyone involved
June	Collect data: • final report card marks • class profiles.	All staff
	Status update: Examine data, looking for trends in student achievement.	Staff, parents, and students (where appropriate); evaluation teams
	Celebrate successes.	Entire school community

7 How Do We Evaluate the Results?

In chapter 5, in our outline of the activities involved in creating the school improvement plan, we discussed the importance of both ongoing monitoring of the plan and regularly scheduled checkpoints for evaluation. The objective of this monitoring and evaluation activity is to ensure that the hard work of staff, school council members, parents, and students is having the desired effect—that is, that the strategies being implemented are enhancing student achievement.

Because both staff and school council members may change from one school year to the next, September of year 2 is probably the best time to plan revisions to the school plan.

Forming evaluation teams

In September of year 2, schools should form an evaluation team for each of the three priority areas: curriculum delivery, school environment, and parental involvement.

The same procedures should be used to encourage participation and select representative teams as were used to form the action teams that drafted the plan (see chapter 5). People who participated in either the planning or action teams should be eligible to continue their involvement in the plan, and new participants should be welcomed. Again, staff, school council members, parents, other community members, and students should have the option of signing up for the evaluation team to which they feel they have the most to contribute, and each evaluation team should have a leader to facilitate the team's work.

Collecting data

At the beginning of the school improvement planning process, school and board data provide direction for the establishment of priorities. As the improvement strategies are implemented, schools continue to gather data, comparing them to the original material. Much of the information schools use to evaluate the plan's progress will come from the same sources as the original material: report card marks, the results of EQAO's assessments, class profiles, behaviour incident reports, parent surveys, and so on.

By establishing an ongoing process of data collection and analysis, the principal models assessment and evaluation practices that teachers can use in their classrooms to monitor student progress. For example, schools produce three or four report cards a year. The mid-term secondary school report card provides

particularly useful information for assessing the progress of improvement strategies. A summary of report card marks that includes the original report card data allows for easy comparisons.

Formal or informal surveys of staff, parents, and students, as well as focus groups made up of parents and students, can also serve as valuable data collection vehicles. Below are examples of the kind of survey questions that can help schools assess their progress towards goals in the areas of improving the school environment and increasing parental involvement.

This forum has been a positive process, where those who are truly concerned about education are able to voice their concerns and ideas and communicate with each other.

Examples:

As a result of our work, the school is a safer place for students.

1	5	10
Strongly Agree		***Strongly Disagree***

Through our newsletter and website, we are now communicating more effectively with parents in our community.

1	5	10
Strongly Agree		***Strongly Disagree***

Principals should consult staff, school councils, evaluation team members, parents, other community members, and students about additional ways of evaluating the plan's progress.

Data collection can be an onerous and time-consuming task. Everyone involved in school improvement planning should keep in mind that data are collected to provide a basis for evaluation, but are also a source for identifying (and, later, celebrating) successes, illuminating future directions, nipping potential failures in the bud, and keeping everyone's focus on improvement.

We repeat: Lasting change takes time. It occurs when there is a clear plan, a reasonably long time frame, and a process of constant monitoring and regular revision. Revisions must be based on reliable data collected in a systematic way over time, and they must clearly serve the goals of the plan, which remain unchanged.

Conducting a year-end evaluation

A formal evaluation should occur at the end of year 2 (the first year of implementation). Year-end is an appropriate time to assess and, if necessary, refocus or fine-tune the plan. Year-end is also a time to celebrate the school's accomplishments and progress.

Staff, school councils, parents, other community members, and students should be given an opportunity to evaluate all of the information that the school has collected throughout the year and comment on the effectiveness of the strategies that have been implemented.

Everyone should keep in mind that this is an evaluation of the strategies in the plan, not of the goals. (Focuses and time lines may be evaluated too.) Unless there is clear evidence that a school has selected inappropriate or unachievable goals, the goals should not be altered.

Evaluation teams should coordinate the evaluations for their areas of priority. After reviewing summaries of the data

collected in their areas, they should ask themselves questions such as the following:

- Is there anything in the information that you do not understand?
- If so, what would you like clarified?
- Is there anything about the information that you find surprising?
- Is there anything that concerns you?
- Did our students do as well as you expected them to do?
- Does the information paint a different picture from the one you have seen in your classroom (teachers and students) or your home (parents and students)?

Then evaluation teams should review the strategies that are in place, and assess whether these strategies have been effective in pursuing the goal. If the evaluation team members agree that the strategies need to be modified, then they should ask themselves the following question:

- What exactly should we do that is *different* to help us reach our goal in this area?

Once they have arrived at a new or revised strategy, evaluation teams must then consider the strategies that follow in the school improvement plan for year 3 and beyond. If these strategies are still appropriate, they should remain in place. If they need to be changed as a result of revisions to the year 2 strategies, they should be reviewed and adjusted appropriately.

Evaluation teams then complete the last column in the planning chart (figure 5), noting the revisions. (If it is deemed necessary, a completely revised chart may be drawn up.)

At the end of September, representatives of the evaluation teams present the draft revised plan to staff, the school council, parents, other community members, and students (where appropriate) for review and feedback. They then incorporate any further changes and pass the revised plan on to the principal, for presentation to the school community at the beginning of October.

8 How Do We Keep Up the Good Work?

This has helped to unite us, and will enable us to continue to work together to achieve our goals.

Using the original (or, if the plan was changed, the revised) plan, schools continue to pursue the implementation and monitoring process.

Year 3 and beyond

By now, schools have been working with the school improvement plan for a full year. Data collection, monitoring procedures, periodic evaluations, and status updates are part of their normal routine. Principals continue to organize professional development opportunities to support staff and school council members as they implement the plan.

At this stage, schools, their principals, staffs, school councils, and parents may be greatly tempted to move on to other goals or switch their focus to new areas. They may have met certain benchmarks and received positive feedback for their efforts, and therefore think: "We've done that. Let's move on." What they are probably experiencing is minor change.

Minor change is worth celebrating, but it is not the same as accomplishing the goal. Principals should ensure that teachers and all partners involved in the improvement process renew their focus on the plan's goals, and implement the plan's strategies consistently and effectively. This is the only way to ensure real change and long-term gains.

By year 3, principals may begin to feel the pressure of other initiatives and other areas of focus from the board and the ministry, as well as from within the school itself. Schools will have to cope with many of these new initiatives, but they should not lose their focus on the improvement plan. If, in complying with new initiatives, a principal allows the school's improvement plan to be abandoned, staff, school council members, parents, and students may feel that the school never really intended to make *significant* improvements. Superintendents need to understand the amount of time school improvement takes and protect the process.

School councils continue to play a valuable role in year 3. If the plan is working, parents will begin to see some of the results in the improved achievement of their children. By sharing the data that documents improvement and by keeping parents informed about the next steps in the plan, school councils, working with principals, can send parents a clear message that the school has a vision and is serious about improving student achievement. Parents will then understand and support the school if it declines to immediately take up a new initiative.

Everyone should remember that the school improvement planning process allows schools—in establishing their

priorities and setting their goals—to decide what they will do *at this time* and what they will not do *at this time*. Principals can respond to new initiatives by saying: "We will do what we can, but this isn't part of our current plan. We will put it forward for further consideration as part of our *next* plan." If parents have participated in the process and been kept informed about the school's progress, they are likely to support the principal's decision.

At the end of year 3, schools begin the planning cycle again. New priorities, goals, focuses, strategies, time lines and so on—all the components of the original improvement plan—are established. Resources and supports (outlined in chapter 6) are renewed, and implementation of the new plan begins. (As we noted in chapter 1, schools may choose to establish planning cycles that are longer than three years.)

Before beginning a new cycle of improvement planning, however, schools should take the time to celebrate their improvements. Recognizing and publicizing the school's improvements and the hard work that went into these achievements is vital to the continuing success of the school improvement planning process.

Endnotes

It is my hope that this exercise serves as a model for all schools in Ontario. Great things can happen when parents and schools work together.

[1] The EIC's reports on individual boards are available on the EIC's website, *http://eic.edu.gov.on.ca.*

[2] Ontario, Education Improvement Commission, *The Road Ahead – IV: A Report on Improving Schools Through Greater Accountability.* (Toronto: the Commission, 2000), 10.

[3] Ontario, Education Improvement Commission, *The Road Ahead – III: A Report on the Role of School Councils* (Toronto: the Commission, 1998), 12.

[4] Appendix A provides a brief description of the pilot projects and names the schools involved. For more information about the pilot projects or the experiences of individual schools, please contact the people listed in the appendix.

[5] References to "parents" in this document should be taken to include legal guardians of children.

[6] Ontario, Ministry of Education and Training, *The Ontario Curriculum, Grades 1-8: Language* (Toronto: the Ministry, 1997), 4. Curriculum policy documents for all subject areas describe expectations and achievement levels in the same way as the document quoted.

[7] Ibid.

[8] Lezotte, Lawrence W. and Barbara C. Jacoby, *A Guide to the School Improvement Process Based on Effective Schools Research* (Okemos, Mich.: Effective Schools Products, in cooperation with Michigan Institute for Educational Management, 1990); and Leithwood, K.A. and Robert Aitken, *Making Schools Smarter: A System for Monitoring School and District Progress* (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Corwin Press, 1995).

[9] Lezotte, Lawrence W. and Barbara C. Jacoby, op. cit., 10.

[10] Epstein, Joyce L., L. Coates, K.C. Salinas, M.G. Sanders, and B.S. Simon, *School, Family and Community Partnerships: Your Handbook for Action* (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Corwin Press, 1997); and Epstein, Joyce L., *School and Family Partnerships: Report 6* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University, Center on Families, Communities, Schools and Children's Learning, 1992).

[11] Class profiles are discussed later in this chapter.

[12] Lezotte, Lawrence W. and Barbara C. Jacoby, op. cit.

[13] Based on the characteristics of effective schools set out in Lezotte, Lawrence W. and Barbara C. Jacoby, op. cit., as well as research on effective schools conducted by K.A. Leithwood, Michael J. Schmoker, and others. (See Appendix G, "Additional Resources," for published works by these authors.)

[14] Epstein, Joyce L., L. Coates, K.C. Salinas, M.G. Sanders, and B.S. Simon, op. cit., 8.

Appendix A: School Improvement Planning Project

In January 2000, the Education Improvement Commission (EIC) invited schools across the province to participate in a school improvement planning project. The goal was to identify effective strategies for developing school improvement plans that lead to enhanced student achievement and increased parental involvement in education.

Applicants were asked to submit letters from both the principal and the school council chair stating why they wanted their school to participate in the project.

Of the many schools that applied, 10 elementary schools were selected, representing the English-language, English-language Catholic, French-language, and French-language Catholic systems. The selected schools were located in rural and urban areas in both the southern and northern regions of the province. The population of the schools ranged from 200 to over 800 students. Each school had its own unique characteristics and needs.

Four facilitators worked with the principals, staff, and parents (and, in one school, students) to develop improvement plans. The facilitators gathered related data on improvement planning from a variety of sources and analysed it with school-parent teams to establish a basis for creating a plan. The schools involved and their communities undertook many of the activities outlined in this handbook.

Schools worked on their plans throughout April, May, and June 2000. At the end of June, each school had successfully developed a plan, with the school council, parents, and, in some cases, other community members acting as equal partners in the development. Implementation of these plans will begin in all of the schools in fall 2000.

The Canadian Education Association is coordinating a three-year research project involving the 10 schools in the project, looking at the school improvement planning process and assessing whether student achievement improves. Dr. Kenneth Leithwood of the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education is conducting the research project.

Throughout the planning process, principals, staff, parents, and students offered positive feedback about the project. Some of their comments are quoted in the margins of this handbook.

These kinds of comments reinforced the value of the project for the EIC. The work of the principals, staff, school councils, parents, and students who participated in this project has contributed greatly to the writing of this handbook and the development of the model that it describes.

The project leader, the facilitators, the Commissioners, and everyone at the EIC thank all the participants for their enthusiasm, commitment, and ideas.

The schools involved are listed below, along with their contacts. For more information about the project, please contact the project leader. For information about the experience of a specific school, please contact the person indicated in the list.

Project leader: Ruth Lambert (416) 325-1073			
Facilitators: Anita Barque, Frank Fera, and Ken Hanson			
District School Board (DSB)	**Director of Education and Phone Number**	**School and Address**	**Principal and Phone Number**
Algoma DSB	Ray De Rosario (705) 945-7111	H.M. Robbins Public School 83 East Balfour Street Sault Ste. Marie ON P6C 1X4	Ron Leishman (705) 945-7119
DSB of Niagara	Bill McLean (905) 641-1550	Princess Margaret School 6624 Culp Street Niagara Falls ON L2G 2C4	Shirley-Ann Teal (905) 354-2333
DSB 38 (London Catholic)	Patrick Dunne (519) 663-2088	St. Mary's School 128 William Street West Lorne ON N0L 2P0	Jennifer Paul-O'Donnell (519) 768-1540
Huron-Superior Catholic DSB	Dr. Cecile Somme (705) 945-5400	St. Patrick School 16 Texas Avenue Sault Ste. Marie ON P6A 4Y8	Toni Nanne-Little (705) 945-5532
Niagara Catholic DSB	Angelo Di Ianni (905) 735-0240	St. Ann Catholic School 218 Main Street St. Catharines ON L2N 4W1	Richard Cull (905) 934-1755
Thames Valley DSB	John Laughlin (519) 452-2150	J.P. Robarts Public School 84 Bow Street London ON N5V 1B1	Ian Hardie (519) 452-8270
Toronto Catholic DSB	Johanne Stewart (416) 222-8282	St. Veronica School 30 Bank Street Toronto ON M6K 1R3	John Cassidy (416) 393-5280
Toronto DSB	Marguerite Jackson (416) 397-3000	Rose Avenue Public School 675 Ontario Street Toronto ON M4X 1N4	Linda Reichert (416) 393-1260
CSD catholique du Centre-Est de l'Ontario	Marc Godbout (613) 746-2555	École Le Petit Prince 349, rue Olmstead Vanier ON K1L 1B1	Lise Jolicoeur- Boudreau (613) 741-8515
CSD 59 (Est de l'Ontario)	Denis Chartrand (613) 747-3833	École Rose des Vents 1650, 2e Rue Est Cornwall ON K6H 2C3	Thérèse Chaput (613) 932-4183

Appendix B: Sample School Improvement Plan

Note: In this sample plan, which begins on the next page, terms that are familiar to teachers and many parents are explained for the general reader.

Goal: To raise the overall level of students' writing skills as measured in standard assessments		
Performance Target: By the end of year 3 (second year of implementation), 60% of the students who were achieving at level 2 in writing will be achieving at level 3.		
Focus	**Strategies**	
Assessment and evaluation	Teachers in each grade will use the Ontario curriculum exemplars published by the Ministry of Education to develop "rubrics" or charts that describe the knowledge and skills students should demonstrate in writing at each of the four levels of achievement. They will also select samples of student work that illustrate each of the four levels of achievement. This strategy will be carried out as follows: • Teachers in each grade will design an end-of-term writing activity for their students. • Teachers in each grade will develop a rubric for the task, based on the achievement chart in the appropriate Ministry of Education curriculum document, and provide students with this rubric when they are given the assignment. • Teachers in each grade will mark the assignments together and select a piece of writing that represents each of the four levels of achievement. • Teachers will provide copies of the rubric to students and their parents. Students will use the rubrics and copies of the samples from the above exercise (all samples will have the student-author's name removed) to learn to assess their own work, as follows: • Teachers will model how to assess a piece of writing. • Students, working in pairs, will use the rubric and samples to assess each other's work in writing. Teachers and students will help parents to understand the assessment practices, as follows: • Teachers in each grade will hold a curriculum evening for parents to help parents understand what work at each of the four levels looks like. • During a student-led conference (i.e., a meeting at school, led by a student, between the student and his/her parents to discuss the student's progress; the teacher is available to assist and answer questions, if necessary), students will help their parents to understand the assessment system.	

	Indicators of Success	Time Lines	Responsibility	Status Update	Revisions
		Year 2, terms 1, 2, and 3		Year 2, December, March, and June	
	Assignments created.		Teachers		
	Task-specific rubrics developed.		Teachers working with grade team partners		
	Samples selected.		Teachers working with grade team partners		
	Copies of rubric provided to students and parents.	Year 3, term 1	Teachers		
		Year 3, terms 1, 2, and 3		Year 3, December, March, and June	
			Teachers		
	Students assign appropriate marks, and provide comments that support their assessments.		Students		
		Year 3		Year 3, December, March, and June	
	Event held. Parents indicate that they understand what to look for in their child's written work.		Teachers, parents		
	Students explain assessment system effectively.		Students		

(continued on next page)

Goal: To raise the overall level of students' writing skills as measured in standard assessments (continued)		
Focus	**Strategies**	
Reasoning and the organization of ideas in written language	Teachers will teach and model content conferences (students, working in pairs, discuss the content—as opposed to the grammar, spelling, etc.—of a piece of one another's work; also known as peer conferences), focusing on reasoning and the organization of ideas in written language, as follows: • Teachers will develop an organizer that helps students focus on reasoning and the organization of ideas during the content conference. • Students will hold their content conferences, using the organizer. Throughout the year, including after content conferences, teachers will post in their classrooms samples of student writing that exhibit good skills in reasoning and the organization of ideas. The school will hold a curriculum meeting for parents, as follows: • Teachers will provide parents with copies of the organizer students used. • Teachers will model strategies that parents can use to help students focus on reasoning and the organization of ideas while revising and editing their own work at home.	

	Indicators of Success	Time Lines	Responsibility	Status Update	Revisions
	Description of conference posted, as well as models of the kinds of questions that can guide the conference.	Year 3, term 1	Teachers	Year 3, December, March, and June	
	Organizer developed.		Teachers		
	Students use the organizer in their content conferences to assess the reasoning and organization of information in one another's writing.		Teachers, students		
	Samples of work posted.	Year 3, terms 1, 2, and 3	Teachers	Year 3, December. March, and June	
		Year 3, term 2		Year 3, December. March, and June	
	Copies provided.		Teachers		
			Teachers, parents		

Goal: To increase positive student behaviour

Performance Target: 1. By the end of year 3 (the second year of implementation), there will be a 50% reduction in the number of reported bullying incidents.
2. By the end of year 3 (the second year of implementation), there will be a 40% reduction in the number of behaviour infractions.

Focus	Strategies	
Bullying	A committee of the principal, teachers, school council members, parents, and other community members will investigate anti-bullying programs and decide upon a program for the school, as follows: • Committee members will conduct a literature search. • The committee will arrange for publishers of anti-bullying programs to present their programs to the committee for review and consideration. • The committee will consult guidance counsellor(s). • The committee will develop a bullying incident log for the principal/vice-principal to use to gather information on specific bullying incidents at the school. • The committee will decide on a program and take the necessary steps to acquire it (e.g., purchase it, if necessary). The school will hold a parent evening to outline the new anti-bullying program. The school will provide all staff with training in the implementation of the program. The school will implement an anti-bullying program in the intermediate division as a pilot project. The school will modify the program on the basis of lessons learned from the pilot project, and implement the program school-wide.	

	Indicators of Success	Time Lines	Responsibility	Status Update	Revisions
	Committee formed.	Year 2, term 1	Administration, teachers, parents	Year 2, December, March, and June	
	Literature, programs, etc., reviewed and experts, guidance counsellors, etc., consulted.		Committee		
			Committee		
			Committee		
	Log created and maintained.		Committee, administration		
	Program acquired and set up.		Committee, administration		
	75% of parents attend the evening.	Year 2, term 1	Administration, teachers, committee members	Year 2, December, March, and June	
	100% of staff receive training.	Year 2, term 1	Administration, working with consultants; teachers.	Year 2, December, March, and June	
	40% decrease in incidents of bullying among intermediate division students	Implementation: year 2, term 1	Administration, teachers	Year 2, December, March, and June	
		Indicator of success: by end of year 2			
	50% decrease in incidents of bullying at the school	Implementation: year 3, term 1	Administration, teachers	Year 3, December, March, and June	
		Indicator of success: by end of year 3			

(continued on next page)

Goal: To increase positive student behaviour (continued)

Focus	Strategies
Code of behaviour	A committee of the principal, teachers, school council members, parents, other community members, and students will develop a code of behaviour, as follows: • As with the anti-bullying program, committee members will review available information, including other schools' and their own board's codes of behaviour and the provincial Code of Conduct, before developing the code. • The committee will develop a behaviour infraction log for the principal/vice-principal to use to gather baseline information on specific infractions. The school will send the code to all parents, with a tear-off sheet for parents to return, acknowledging receipt of the code. The school will hold an assembly to introduce the code to all students. The school will post the code in every room and print it in the agenda book. The administration will provide staff with information on behaviour infractions (as recorded in the log) on a regular basis at staff meetings. The school will implement the code of behaviour and enforce it.

	Indicators of Success	Time Lines	Responsibility	Status Update	Revisions
		Year 2	Administration, teachers, school council, parents, students	Year 2, December, March, and June	
	Literature, programs, etc., reviewed and experts, guidance counsellors, etc., consulted.				
	Code established.		Administration, committee		
	Log established and maintained.		Administration, committee		
	85% of parents return tear-off sheet indicating they have received the code.	Year 2, term 2	Administration, school council	Year 2, December, March, and June	
	Assembly held; all students attend.	Year 2, term 2	Administration, teachers	Year 2, December, March, and June	
	Posters outlining the code posted in every room.	Year 2, term 2	Teachers	Year 2, December, March, and June	
	Staff meeting agenda and minutes indicate that information was provided.	Year 2 (ongoing)	Administration	Year 2, December, March, and June	
	Implementation begins.	Year 2, term 3	Administration, teachers, parents, students	Year 2, December, March, and June	
	40% decrease in documented behaviour infractions	Indicator of success: by end of year 3		Year 3, December, March, and June	

Goal: To help parents support their children's learning at home	
Performance Target:	1. By the end of year 3 (second year of implementation), 80% of parents will report that they provide support to their children with homework on a regular basis. 2. By the end of year 3 (second year of implementation), there will be a 60% increase in the rate of homework assignments completed on time.

Focus	Strategies
Develop and implement a homework policy.	A committee made up of the principal, teachers, school council members, parents, and students will review Ministry of Education and board policies on homework and report their findings to the administration, staff, and school council. The committee will develop a homework policy that includes the following elements: • a definition of homework, including the various kinds of activities that could be included • a rationale for why teachers give homework • a guideline for how much homework should be given to students • an outline of the responsibilities of teachers, students, and parents with respect to homework. School will implement homework policy. School will establish an agenda book program, as follows: • Each student will receive an agenda book in which to record daily homework assignments. • Each parent will be asked to initial the student's agenda book to indicate that the parent has assured himself or herself that the student has completed the assignment. School will develop a homework handbook, to include the following: • a weekly plan of homework assignments • details about the assignments (e.g., how completed assignments are to be presented, level of parental involvement requested) • general information about the role parents can play in supporting their children's satisfactory completion of homework assignments. The school will provide each student with a handbook, and advise all parents about the handbook and its purpose.

	Indicators of Success	Time Lines	Responsibility	Status Update	Revisions
	Committee formed. Findings reported to administration, staff, and school council.	Year 2, term 1	Teachers, school council, parents, students	Year 2, December, March, and June	
	Policy is developed.	Year 2, term 2	Teachers, school council	Year 2, December, March, and June	
	Staff use policy guidelines to assign homework.	Year 2, term 3	Teachers	Year 2, December, March, and June	
		Year 3 (ongoing)	Administration, teachers, parents, students.	Year 3, December, March, and June	
	Each student has an agenda book, and uses it.				
	80% of parents regularly initial their children's agenda books.	By end of year 3			
	Handbook developed.	Year 3 (ongoing)	Administration, teachers	Year 3, December, March, and June	
	Each student has a handbook.				
	All parents are advised about the handbook and its purpose.				

(continued on next page)

Goal: To help parents support their children's learning at home (continued)		
Focus	**Strategies**	
	The school will set up a link (via telephone or the Internet) that parents can use to check for homework that has been assigned to their children. Teachers will collect and log information about homework completion rates, amount of homework, etc., in a systematic fashion, for comparison purposes.	
Improve parents' knowledge about the curriculum.	The school will hold a curriculum evening for parents, as follows: • Teachers will show parents how to help their children with homework (for example, teachers could provide parents with and explain the organizer used to help students improve their skills in reasoning and organization of information — that is, they could combine a strategy from the goal on curriculum delivery with this strategy to increase the level of parental involvement)	

	Indicators of Success	Time Lines	Responsibility	Status Update	Revisions
	Link established.	Year 3 (ongoing)	Administration, teachers	Year 3, December, March, and June	
	Information is collected and logged.	Year 2, term 1 (then ongoing maintenance)	Administration, teachers	Years 2 and 3, December, March, and June	
	Increase of 60% in homework assignments completed on time.	By end of year 3			
	75% of parents attend event.	Year 2, term 1	Administration, school council, teachers	Year 2, December, March, and June	
	Parents indicate they understand how to help their children with their homework.				

Appendix C: Characteristics of an Effective Principal

The principal's leadership is essential to the process of change. Principals can transform their schools into effective centres of learning for all students.

To be effective, principals should:

1. Develop and communicate a shared vision that builds commitment

(Answer the question: "What do we care about here?")

- involve staff, school council members, parents, and other community members in the development of a shared vision
- use the district school board's mission statement and goals to provide direction for the school's vision
- communicate the school's vision to staff, students, the school council, parents, and the broader community
- involve all parts of the community in support of the school's vision
- clarify the practical implications of the school's vision for programs, instruction, and so on
- help staff, school council members, other parents, and the broader community understand the relationship between Ministry of Education initiatives, the district school board's mission statement and goals, and the school's vision

2. Build consensus about school goals and priorities

(Answer the question: "What is our particular focus for change?")

- work with staff, the school council, parents, and other community members to establish the school's goals
- ensure that the school's goals are limited to a small number of well-defined goals that apply to all children in the school
- communicate the school's goals to all staff, students, parents, and the broader community
- base improvement plans and decisions explicitly on these goals
- build support and commitment for the school's improvement plan
- ensure that individual teachers understand that they are expected to develop and pursue their own professional goals
- use the school's goals as the basis of discussions with individual teachers about their own professional goals

3. Build a productive school environment

(Answer the question: "How will we work together to support each other in this process?")

- encourage and support teachers who are working together to initiate joint projects
- support projects in which teamwork is a useful method of working
- encourage risk taking and experimentation and support it, understanding that mistakes are part of the improvement process
- provide individual staff members with support as needed
- promote an environment that values diversity and team building and that focuses on intense communication and information sharing
- provide networking opportunities for staff so that they can share ideas with and ask questions of other teachers from within the school and from other schools
- create/encourage a caring, supportive environment
- celebrate successes and give credit where credit is due

4. Alter school structures to enhance participation in decision making

(Answer the question: "How will the school work to support our goals?")

- use staff meetings as opportunities for shared decision making and for teachers' professional development
- allow staff to manage their own decision-making committees
- trust teachers and give them the autonomy to make decisions within the framework of school goals
- involve teachers *before* making a decision
- make unilateral decisions only when appropriate, and promptly inform staff of those decisions and the reasons for them
- allocate resources to support school goals
- create timetables, allocate classrooms, and so on, to facilitate teachers' ability to work together
- share information with staff, so that they can make informed decisions
- follow through on decisions made jointly with teachers
- provide opportunities outside of the school for staff to develop their leadership skills
- look for examples of teacher and parent leadership, and celebrate them when they emerge

5. Model the values promoted by the school

(Answer the question: "How do we need to work differently in order for change to occur?")

- lead by *doing*, rather than by telling
- use leadership practices that serve as models when interacting with students, staff, the school council, parents, and other community members
- model problem-solving and communication strategies that staff can readily use in working with students, parents, and other teachers

- publicly acknowledge staff for their involvement in school activities and special events
- demonstrate appreciation for the contributions of staff, the school council, parents, and other community members to problem-solving activities
- stay informed about education practice and policies, and share this knowledge with staff, the school council, parents, and other community members
- become involved in all aspects of school activity
- work hard and take risks from time to time
- display energy and enthusiasm
- inspire respect, and use humour to provide perspective

6. Provide intellectual stimulation

(Answer the question: "How do we come together as a community of learners?")

- encourage staff to adopt a philosophy of lifelong learning
- encourage staff to see themselves as part of a community of learners, where learning and teaching are valued
- stimulate staff to think about what they are doing for their students, and provide them with opportunities to share best practices
- encourage staff to pursue their own professional development, and support their growth
- support staff's attendance at conferences and other professional development opportunities, and provide a chance for staff to share information from these events with their colleagues
- attend conferences and share the ideas from these events with staff
- read books and professional literature on topics related to the school's goals
- discuss own professional goals with staff, and encourage staff to reveal and discuss their professional goals
- make staff development the focus of staff meetings
- use staff meetings and other opportunities to model strategies that can be applied in the classroom
- be aware of current trends and issues, as well as threats and opportunities in the school environment and in society at large (that is, see the "big picture"), and communicate this information to staff and the entire school community.

Effective principals model, above all else, that schools are *learning organizations*, focused on student achievement.

Based on research in Leithwood, K.A. and D. Jantzi, "Transformational Leadership: How Principals Can Help Reform School Cultures," *School Effectiveness and School Improvement*, 1990, 1(4), 249–80.

Appendix D: Understanding the Expectations and Achievement Levels in the Ministry of Education's Curriculum Documents

All teachers must understand the learning expectations for students and the achievement levels set out in the Ministry of Education's curriculum documents. When teachers have a common understanding of these standards, the data that they collect on student achievement, and that forms the basis of decisions on school improvement goals and strategies, will be reliable data.

The following resources and activities can be used to enhance the reliability of the information that a school collects on student achievement and to create class profiles that are accurate and useful for school improvement planning.

We acknowledge that these resources and activities are aimed at elementary school teachers, but secondary school teachers will find much in them that is useful. As the Ministry of Education publishes exemplars that reflect the achievement levels in the new secondary school curriculum documents (see the "Resources" section below), secondary school teachers will have additional resources at their disposal. We urge secondary school teachers, however, to read the following material and use the information in it as a basis for starting to develop reliable data on student achievement that can be used for improvement planning.

Resources

Exemplars

The Ministry of Education is in the process of publishing a series of "exemplars," which provide samples of student work that illustrate the four levels of achievement established by the ministry for assessing students. The exemplars are designed to help teachers understand how the achievement levels apply to student work.

In 1999, the ministry published English-language exemplars for Grades 1 to 8 Reading and Writing; to date in 2000, it has published French-language exemplars for Lecture and for Écriture. Exemplars that cover Grades 1 to 8 Mathematics (for the English-language systems) and Grades 1 to 8 Mathématiques (for the French-language systems), as well as exemplars for both English- and French-language courses at the secondary school level should be available by the end of 2000. (See Appendix G, "Additional Resources," for full bibliographic citations of the exemplars published to date.)

In addition to using the exemplars to understand the achievement levels, teachers should realize that they can assign the tasks in the exemplars—that is, the tasks on which the samples in the

exemplars are based—to their own students, and compare their own students' performance with the representative samples in the exemplars. (Each exemplar contains full instructions to teachers on how to administer the tasks and activities on which the exemplar samples are based.) This is an excellent way to establish baseline information on student achievement. (We discuss this topic again in Activity 2, below.)

Anchor Booklets

Anchor Booklets are published annually by the Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO) to help teachers understand the levels of achievement used by EQAO in marking the Grades 3 and 6 reading, writing, and mathematics assessments it conducts. The booklets give clear examples of work at each level of achievement.

To date, EQAO has only published these booklets in English. Similar booklets for the French-language systems will be available following the next round of EQAO tests.

Activities

Activity 1: Measuring the Reliability of Report Card Marks

1. Teachers record the following information:

- the first-term report card marks of students in Grades 4 and 7 in reading, writing, and math
- the EQAO achievement levels of students in Grades 4 and 7, as assigned the previous year when they took the EQAO Grade 3 and 6 tests.

2. Teachers then create one chart per student, like the one shown in figure D1, to compare the two sets of marks.
3. The principal meets, to discuss the comparisons, with all Grade 4 teachers (individually or as a group, depending on the comparisons) and all Grade 7 teachers (individually or as a group, depending on the comparisons).

Figure D1. Comparison of EQAO and Report Card Data for a Grade 4 Student

Subject		Term 1 Report	EQAO Results
Reading – Overall level of achievement		2	3
Writing – Overall level of achievement		3	1
Mathematics Strands	Number Sense and Numeration	2	2
	Measurement	1	1
	Geometry and Spatial Sense	3	3
	Patterning and Algebra	3	3
	Data Management and Probability	3	3

4. If the report cards marks are quite different from the EQAO test results (for example, as shown in the writing category in figure D1), the discussion should revolve around the following set of questions:

- Is there anything about the marks that you find surprising?
- Is there anything that concerns you?
- How do the marks fit with your feelings about how the student is doing in his/her daily work?
- Do the marks seem accurate, compared to what you have experienced in your classroom?
- Did the student do as well as you expected on the EQAO tests?
- What are some of the differences between the EQAO results and your report card marks?
- What are some of the differences between the work the student did for the EQAO assessment and the work in the student's file?
- What explanation do you have for these differences?

5. Following this discussion, each teacher should examine and compare samples of each student's classroom work in the problem subject (writing, in figure D1) with the work in that subject that the student submitted for the EQAO assessment. In most cases, the samples will be quite similar, since the EQAO sample was completed in May and the classroom work between September and November.

6. If the EQAO and report card marks differ significantly (as in the writing category in figure D1), the teacher and the principal should consider whether the teacher would benefit from professional development opportunities on the topic of assessment and evaluation, to develop a clearer understanding of the ministry's achievement levels.

Activity 2: Creating Class Profiles

Generating baseline information on student achievement:

1. In June (or at the end of the final term in secondary schools), teachers ask students to perform the task set out in the Ministry of Education's exemplar document for the subject —that is, the same task on which the samples in the exemplar are based.

2. Teachers use the samples of student work in the exemplars document when marking their own students' work, to help them determine each student's level of achievement.

3. Teachers pass their students' work and the level of achievement assigned to it on to the students' next year's teacher. This "portfolio" becomes the baseline information for assessment in the next school year.

Assessing student achievement throughout the year:

1. Teachers choose an end-of-term assignment (November/December and March at the elementary level), much like the task set out in the Ministry of Education's exemplar document for the subject. For example, at the elementary level the assignment could be a reading passage with questions, a piece of writing, and a math problem for each strand of the mathematics curriculum.

2. Same-grade teachers (for example, all Grade 3 teachers; at the secondary level, same-grade/same-subject teachers) mark five or six of the assignments together to ensure that they take a consistent and mutually agreed-upon approach that is based on the expectations and achievement levels in the curriculum documents.
3. The same group of teachers then chooses one piece of student work that represents achievement at level 4, one piece that represents achievement at level 3, one piece that represents achievement at level 2, and one piece that represents achievement at level 1 (that is, examples of A, B, C, and D work).
4. Teachers use the samples of student work chosen in step 3 to assign marks/achievement levels to the remaining assignments.
5. Teachers create a class profile that includes the achievement levels of all students in the subject or subjects involved. Figures D2, D3, and D4 provide examples of class profiles for elementary-level reading, writing, and math.

Figure D2. Class Profile, Reading

Student Name	Achievement Level
Student A	3
Student B	2
Student C	3

Figure D3. Class Profile, Writing

Student Name	Achievement Level
Student A	3
Student B	2
Student C	3

Figure D4. Class Profile, Mathematics

Student Name	Number Sense and Numeration	Measurement	Geometry and Spatial Sense	Patterning and Algebra	Data Management and Probability
Student A	3	4	4	3	3
Student B	3	3	2	2	2
Student C	2	3	2	3	3

6. Teachers and principal meet three times a year to discuss the class profiles.

7. Teachers and principals may compare class profile marks with report card marks and EQAO results. (Principals can now aggregate report card marks electronically, making this task easier to perform.)

8. Teachers and principals may want to discuss the use of special programs or the adjustment of teaching strategies to help low-achieving students improve. They may also want to focus on strategies that would help those level 2 students who are approaching level 3 reach the provincial standard.

9. **Note:** Teachers should get into the habit of creating an achievement chart, or rubric, similar to the ones that are in the curriculum and exemplar documents *for every major assignment and test* that they give to students. By specifying for students the task- or test-specific expectations that will apply and by providing the rubric that will be used to assess students' work, teachers can help students focus on the knowledge and skills they must acquire *and demonstrate* to improve their level of achievement. Teachers will also be providing themselves with carefully considered standards, derived from ministry documents, against which to mark each assignment or test.

Appendix E: Sample Parent Survey

How Are We Doing? How [insert school name] listens to and responds to parents and guardians

What you feel and say about our school is important to us. Your opinions affect how we plan, how we teach and assess your children, and how we communicate with you.

- Are you receiving the information you want about our school's direction?
- Do you have a clear understanding of our policies and practices?
- Are you kept up to date on your child's progress?
- Do you feel you have opportunities to become involved in the school?
- Are your concerns as a parent well represented by the school council?

We need to know.

The purpose of this survey is to gather your thoughts about the quality of [insert school name]'s programs and services. Conducted [X] times a year, this survey is one of many ways our school involves parents. The overall results of the survey will be published in our newsletter and available from our website [insert website address, if applicable]. All individual responses will be kept confidential.

Please complete this form and return it with your child (one student per family) by [insert due date] to:

[insert contact name]

[insert school address]

If you have any questions, please call me, [insert school principal's name], at [insert phone number].

Thank you for your time and involvement. Together, we will make our children's futures brighter!

Sincerely,

[insert principal's name/signature]

[start new page or new panel]

[insert school name] Survey of Parents and Guardians

What you think, feel, and say about our school influences our planning, programs, and services. To help us, please take a few minutes to answer the following questions. All personal information and individual responses will be kept confidential.

Please note: This survey will take about 25 minutes. If you would like extra copies, please call us at [insert phone number].

Date: _____

Name (optional): _____

Child's/Children's Grade/Grades: _____

How to complete this survey:

This survey has two parts. Part A asks general questions requiring a Yes or No response. Part B includes questions that are based on research about what makes schools effective, and it allows for a range of responses.

Part A

Please circle YES or NO.

1. Our school's goals to improve learning are easy to understand.	YES	NO
2. I understand our school's code of behaviour.	YES	NO
3. The staff holds high expectations for all students.	YES	NO
4. I understand our school's policy on homework.	YES	NO
5. Staff members hold themselves accountable for students' academic success.	YES	NO
6. Our school keeps me informed about changes to programs and routines.	YES	NO
7. I understand how the school measures my child's progress.	YES	NO
8. The school makes parents feel welcome.	YES	NO
9. I know whom to contact on the school council.	YES	NO
10. I would like to become more involved in the school.	YES	NO

Part B

Please circle the number that best describes your feelings about each of the following statements.

	Always	Sometimes	Rarely
A clear, focused vision			
1. Our school's vision for student achievement is communicated clearly.	1	2	3
2. The principal promotes the school's vision.	1	2	3
3. The school council supports the school's vision.	1	2	3
4. The school improvement plan is available to review.	1	2	3
5. I am able to say exactly what our school cares about most.	1	2	3
A safe, orderly environment			
1. Our school is a safe place to learn, work, and visit.	1	2	3
2. My child feels safe at school.	1	2	3
3. My child likes school.	1	2	3
4. My child likes his/her teacher.	1	2	3
5. The school's policies and expectations about discipline and behaviour are clear and easy to understand.	1	2	3
High expectations			
1. The principal and teachers at our school believe that all students can learn and achieve.	1	2	3
2. Our school's principal and teachers are role models for good citizenship and positive behaviour.	1	2	3
3. Teachers at my child's school celebrate student achievement.	1	2	3

	Always	Sometimes	Rarely
A focus on high levels of student achievement			
1. I receive information about the Ontario curriculum.	1	2	3
2. Information about the Ontario curriculum is clear and easy to understand.	1	2	3
3. I receive information about the province's standards for student learning and achievement.	1	2	3
4. I receive information about the provincial report card.	1	2	3
5. The students at our school spend most of their time engaged in activities that are directly related to learning.	1	2	3
6. My child's homework comes with clear instructions (e.g., expectations, due dates).	1	2	3
7. My child has homework that encourages him/her to talk to me about his/her day at school.	1	2	3
8. I receive ideas from the school about activities that I can do with my child to help him/her learn.	1	2	3
Instructional leadership			
1. Our school principal understands that he/she will be held accountable for the academic results achieved by students in our school.	1	2	3
2. Our teachers demonstrate an understanding of the Ontario curriculum.	1	2	3
3. The principal and teachers communicate their expectations for student success clearly.	1	2	3
Frequent monitoring of student progress			
1. My child's teacher provides me with information about my child's progress.	1	2	3
2. The teacher lets me know how my child's assignments are graded.	1	2	3
3. The school helps me to understand how I can help my child set goals for his/her education.	1	2	3

	Always	Sometimes	Rarely
4. The school contacts me if my child is having difficulties.	1	2	3
5. I attend parent-teacher interviews.	1	2	3
6. Our school makes me feel like a true partner in my child's education.	1	2	3
Strong home-school relations			
1. Our school involves parents in school planning.	1	2	3
2. Our school involves parents in the development of various policies (e.g., on homework, on behaviour).	1	2	3
3. I receive invitations to school events well in advance.	1	2	3
4. I feel that parents' concerns are well represented by the school council.	1	2	3
5. The school council makes a difference in our school's success.	1	2	3
6. I receive information about school activities.	1	2	3
7. I volunteer at the school.	1	2	3
8. When I volunteer, I receive clear instructions from staff about my role.	1	2	3
9. I feel properly trained to do the work I am asked to carry out as a volunteer.	1	2	3
10. I feel appreciated by the school staff for the work I do as a volunteer.	1	2	3

Is there anything you would like us to know? Please explain.

_____

_____

_____

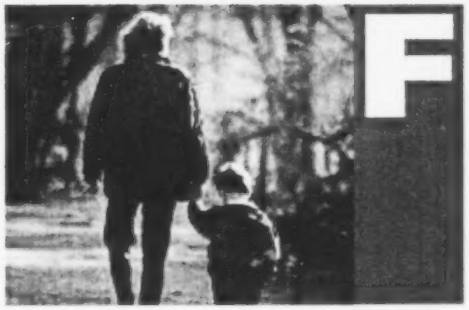
Please return this form with your child (one student per family) by [insert due date] to:

[insert contact name]

[insert school address]

If you have any questions about this survey or can suggest improvements, please call [insert phone number].

Thank you.



Appendix F: Sample Text for a Pamphlet That Principals Can Send to Parents With a Copy of Their School's Improvement Plan

A Blueprint for Student Success

[title for cover panel]

[inside copy (text can be set up on pamphlet "panels" or in brochure form):]

[insert date]

To parents and guardians of students at [insert school name]:

Parents often ask: "What is my child learning?" "How do I know he's learning?" "How well is she doing compared to others?" and "What can I do to help?"

School improvement plans are designed to help us—and you—answer all of those questions.

Successful school improvement plans help schools develop better learning programs, better teaching strategies, and better administrative practices. They honour and build on past successes. They create energy and purpose among students, teachers, support staff, administrators, and parents. They invite us all to participate in positive change—with the ultimate objective of helping students improve their level of academic achievement.

And, at [insert school name], that's our number one priority.

We believe that parents of school-aged children have certain rights related to their children's education:

- the right to know how well students in their school are doing academically
- the right to know what actions the school intends to take to improve student performance
- the right to contribute to the school's development and improvement
- the right to be consulted about and receive information about decisions that affect their children's learning.

Because we believe in these rights, last [insert appropriate month] we encouraged parents and other community members, as well as their representatives on the school council, to participate in developing [insert school name]'s improvement plan.

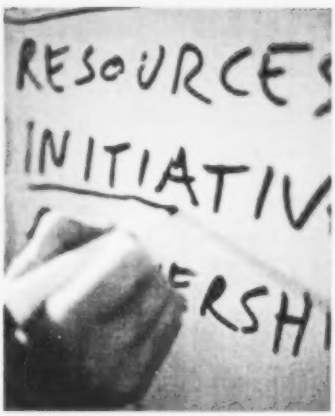
To those of you who did participate, we again extend our warm appreciation for your input and involvement. We couldn't have done it without you.

[Insert school name] now has a school improvement plan!

This pamphlet is designed to help you:

- understand our improvement plan
- learn about the goals we have set for ourselves
- learn about some of the strategies we have for reaching those goals
- get involved in implementing the plan
- participate in monitoring and evaluating our progress in meeting our goals.

If you have any questions or concerns, if you would like to see a copy of the complete plan, or if you would like to get involved in implementing or monitoring the plan, please visit, write, call, fax, or e-mail us. You'll find our contact information at the end of this pamphlet.



Be part of [insert school name]'s improvement plan! Together, we can help our students to secure a successful future.

Sincerely,

[insert principal's name]

[start new panel or page]

What Makes a Good School Improvement Plan?

The best school improvement plans:

- put students first by focusing on improving the level of their academic achievement
- involve the school council, parents, and the community, as well as the principal and teachers, as drafters, implementers, monitors, and evaluators of the plan
- honour the unique nature and characteristics of the school community
- adhere to the province's standards for student learning and student achievement
- are based on reliable data
- follow the research on what makes schools effective
- are realistic, yet aim high
- are easy to understand by everyone in the school community
- remain flexible to change.

What Makes an Effective School?

Research has shown that effective schools have the following characteristics:

- a clear, focused vision for learning
- a safe, orderly environment
- a climate of high expectations that all students can achieve success
- a focus on high levels of student achievement through excellent curriculum delivery
- strong leadership by the principal
- frequent monitoring of student progress
- strong home-school relations.

Our school improvement planning team kept all of the above points in mind as we deliberated. We've come up with a plan that we believe in, and we're committed to realizing it. The goals in this plan will remain [insert school name]'s priorities for at least the next two years.

What Are the Goals of [insert school name]'s Improvement Plan?

With the help of our improvement planning team of staff, school council, parents, and other community members, we have chosen to focus on the following areas:

Our goal to enhance curriculum delivery is [insert goal for this priority area].

We based our decision to focus on this goal on a review of a variety of data about student achievement at our school. We looked at [adjust the following as appropriate] aggregated report card marks, the results of tests conducted by the province's Education Quality and Accountability Office, and the results of tests our students participated in that were administered by the following board, national, and international education organizations: [list names of organizations as appropriate].

While there are other areas in which some or all of our students could improve, after careful deliberation we determined that this goal would be our curriculum delivery priority for the next couple of years.

[Optional: Include some information on specific areas of focus, strategies, and time lines for meeting this goal.]

Our goal to improve the school environment is [insert goal for this priority area].

We decided to focus on this goal after reviewing a wide range of information about our school: [adjust the following as appropriate] student attendance and suspension figures, student conduct and incidents of unacceptable behaviour, homework completion rates, the level of student participation in various school activities, and the kinds of awards we give to students at our school. We also examined the responses of parents and other community members to the survey on our school that we sent out last [insert appropriate month].

While there are several ways in which we could improve the learning environment at our school, after careful deliberation we determined that this goal would be our school environment priority for the next two years.

[Optional: Include some information on specific areas of focus, strategies, and time lines for meeting this goal.]

Our goal to increase the level of parental involvement is [insert goal for this priority area].

We very much want parents to feel welcome in our schools. We want to help you understand the Ministry of Education's curriculum policies and the way your children's progress is assessed. We want you to be true partners with us in educating your children.

We understand that you have work commitments, job schedules, and family situations that may limit the amount of time and energy you can commit to involvement in the school. We have worked hard to find innovative ways to involve you—for example, activities that you can do with your child at home. Our goal reflects these aims.

We based our decision to focus on this goal on the results of the parent survey referred to above, as well as a review of our school profile. You received a copy of the school profile, a detailed description of our school and its community, in [insert appropriate information]. After careful deliberation, we determined that this goal would be our priority for increasing parental involvement for the next couple of years.

[Optional: Include some information on specific areas of focus, strategies, and time lines for meeting this goal.]

How Can You Learn More About Our Plan or Get Involved?

We invite your questions. If you would like to see a copy of the complete plan, please visit the school.

We encourage your participation in implementing and monitoring our plan. And we urge you to join with us in making a commitment to the goals we have set for ourselves. We need more than your cooperation—we need your passion and your strengths. Working together, we can build a school and a community that puts our students first.

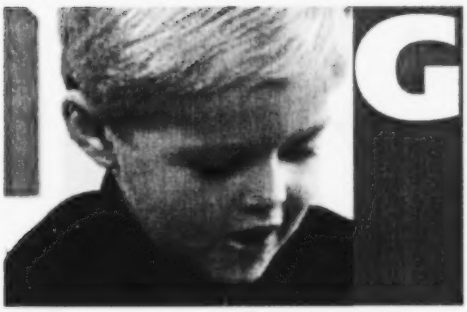
Contact us in one of the following ways:

Write or visit us at: [insert school address]

Phone us at: [insert school phone number]

Send us a fax at: [insert school fax number]

Send us an e-mail at: [insert school e-mail address]



Appendix G: Additional Resources

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The websites and electronic links listed above have been created by or for organizations outside of the Education Improvement Commission, and those organizations are responsible for the information contained within their respective sites. These sites may not be available in French. Any specific comment or inquiry about these sites should be directed to the individual organization.

Education
Improvement
Commission

November 2000

© Education Improvement Commission
ISBN 0-7794-0284-7

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